AUGUST
30th
1923
25c

PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

T. S. Stribling
W. C. Tuttle
Arthur D. Howden Smith
Frederick Moore
Thomson Burtis
William Ashley Anderson
Henry W. Patterson
Will H. Grattan

1 Complete Novel
2 Complete Novelettes

The Little Yellow Envelope That Keeps "Big" Men Small

Homer E. Minor
of Texas

"Six months after starting work I cleared $1000. My next ambition was realized a year ago last October when I moved into a home of my own. Cost $7000—built especially for my work.

"Now guess what I'm planning? Well, I leave in ten days for New York City. Just bought a new car which is being equipped for the trip overland."

Mr. Minor is only one of hundreds who have solved the extra-money problem with our easy money-making plan.

HOW many "big" men have been robbed of the good things in life by the tyranny of "the little yellow envelope" slipped through the cashier's window each week? The number is legion—men who have found a drugging "safety" in meager salaries, but *lost* their real opportunity to make good.

To-day an unknown mechanic asks his friends to back him *with their money* in manufacturing a new invention. They demur—all but one or two. The invention becomes the greatest in automobile history—the inventor one of the world's richest men—the friends who saw their opportunity, millionaires in their own right. But the friends who "stayed out"—are unknown.

For many years we have asked men to invest, *not* money, but only a few minutes of their time to learn the truth about our money-making plan. Thousands have responded. To many hundreds we have given the key to $5, $10, $15 *extra* each week—earned in their spare time. Scores of others, on full time, have built up permanent incomes ranging from $40 a week to $10,000 a year. Why not join these men?

All we ask is the chance to show you how others have made good—with only a few hours work each week—as special representatives of ADVENTURE and our three other leading publications, THE DELINEATOR, THE DESIGNER and EVERYBODY'S. You don't need experience—we *give* you that, and all supplies and particulars absolutely free. There is no obligation of any kind. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by returning the coupon below. Clip it out and mail now!

Very often whole lives are changed by trivial things. So simple an act as clipping a coupon has frequently multiplied incomes 2 and 3 times. The coupon on the right gives you just such an opportunity. Mail it to-day.

Manager, Staff Agencies Division
Box 975, Butterick Bldg., New York City

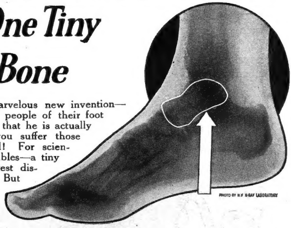
Please send me, without obligation, full particulars of your money-making plan.

Name..

Street..

City.............................. *State*....................

Millions Suffer Foot Tortures -because of One Tiny Misplaced Bone



FOOT specialists have just perfected a marvelous new invention—which is instantly relieving thousands of people of their foot pains—and which gives one the feeling that he is actually *walking on layers of air!* No longer need you suffer those terrible foot pains that leave you exhausted! For scientists have found the real *cause* of most troubles—a tiny misplaced bone in the foot. Even the slightest displacement of this bone means terrible pain. But with this new invention you can gently work this bone *back* into place, with the result that every pain disappears—*instantly*—as if by a touch of a magic wand!

How Startling New Discovery Corrects the Trouble—and Relieves Foot Pains Instantly!

SCIENCE now proves that 99 of every 100 foot pains are caused by a displacement of the *astragalus* bone—a small bone at the top of the foot arches. This bone supports your whole weight. It is held in place by tendons and ligaments. But often these tendons become weakened. This tiny bone is then forced out of place. The result is fallen arches.

The arches are the "springs" of your body. They absorb the shocks of walking. But when the astragalus bone gets displaced, the arches lose their spring. Then the whole weight of your body falls solidly on the delicate bones and muscles of your feet, causing all sorts of foot misery. The muscles become twisted out of place, sensitive bones are placed under terribly unnatural strains, delicate nerves are tortured.

How New Invention Works

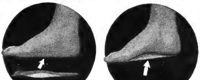
The old way of treating fallen arches made no attempt to bring permanent cure. The arches were merely forced into position by using hard, unyielding braces or props. Instead of **strengthening** the foot muscles that support the arches, these rigid props actually weakened them because they did not exercise the muscles.

But how different is this marvelous new invention, called the Airflex Arch Support. It is made of Russian Sponge Rubber, and is in the form of a light springy pad, scientifically formed to the natural arch. It can be slipped into any style shoe, yet were it not for the comfort it brings, you would never be aware of its presence.

With a gentle even pressure at all points this resilient rubber at once raises the fallen arch to its natural position, gently working the displaced astragalus bone back into place. This instantly releases the pressure on the sensitive nerves and blood vessels, and takes all strain off the weakened muscles.

Brings Permanent Relief

As this light springy rubber yields to your weight, it reproduces exactly the **natural spring of your arch!** Its constant compression and expansion with every step massages, exercises and strengthens the muscles in a natural way—quickly bringing back their old-time strength.



Note the Instantaneous Results!

The new Airflex Arch Supports, which slip into your shoes, are different from anything known before. No rigid appliances; no braces; no straps; no trouble of any kind. Yet the flattened arch is lifted gently back into place, pain is instantly banished—aching bones and muscles are instantly soothed. And every step you take strengthens and builds up the torn and twisted ligaments until the foot becomes normal once more.

The beauty of it all is that results are evident **instantly!** The moment you put on these wonderful supports all pain vanishes and walking becomes an actual pleasure.

Send No Money

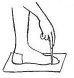
Simply fill in the coupon, giving the exact size of your foot as instructed below. Don't hesitate to order by mail, for every day we fit hundreds in this way. When the postman brings you your supports, just pay him the amazingly low price of $1.95 (plus a few cents postage) in full payment.

Slip the supports into your shoes. Walk on them. Then if you are not amazed at the wonderful relief and comfort they bring, simply return them after 5 days and your money will be instantly refunded. Mail the coupon today—now. THOMPSON-BARLOW CO., Inc. Dept. A-458, 43 West 16th St., New York City

LOW PRICE INTRODUCTORY OFFER COUPON

THOMPSON-BARLOW CO., Inc., Dept. A-458

43 West 16th Street, New York



If not sure of shoe size, stand on piece of paper—trace outline of stockinged foot. Hold pencil upright. Enclose this with coupon.

Send me, at your risk, the proper pair of your new Airflex Arch Supports. I will pay the postman $1.95 (plus few cents postage) with the full understanding that there are no further payments. If I am not satisfied after wearing them, I will return them in five days and you are to refund my money without question.

Name. . . . .

Address. . . . .

City and State. . . . .

Size of Shoe. . . . Width. . . . Men's. . . ☐ Women's ☐

ADVENTURE
Aug. 30th, 1923

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 42
Number 3

Shawknit
TRADE MARK
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.
FINE
HOSIERY

THERE are several new Shawknit numbers which merit your attention. The little gold label on each pair makes it safe to venture, for behind the pleasing seasonable novelty is the unchanging Shawknit standard of service.

SHAW STOCKING CO.
Lowell, Mass.

"It was a great vacation, *but*—

Who'd have dreamt that the bills would mount up so? Clothes, camping duffle, railroad fare, board—and a hundred and one odds and ends—certainly cut heavily into the old B. R. Never again!"

That's how many of us feel after vacation. But we know scores of men who don't—men who get all the pep out of a good vacation, without letting it *take* the pep out of their bank accounts.

Paul Johnson of Connecticut, for example, plans to have the "fishingest two weeks of his life" without touching his savings.

George Evans, of California, is all set for a great time in the Sierras. But his bank book will stay "right in the library."

And these are only two of scores of men who are paying for their vacations—by using their spare time to secure the new and renewal orders to ADVENTURE of their friends and neighbors. Easy? Just like rolling off a log! Profitable? A dollar an hour and better can be earned with very little effort.

All we ask is the chance to show you how others have made good—with only a few hours work each week. You don't need experience—we *give* you that, and all supplies and particulars absolutely free. There is no obligation of any kind. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by returning the coupon. Clip it out and mail now!

Manager, Staff Agencies Division
Box 976, Butterick Bldg., New York City

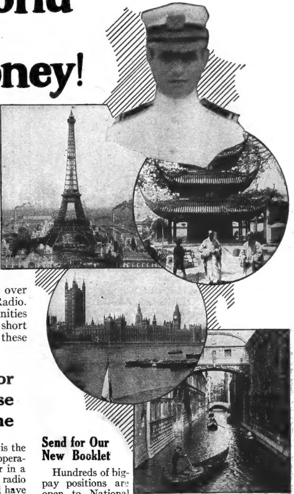
Please send me, without obligation, full particulars of your money-making plan.

Name..........

Street..........

City.......... *State*..........

See The World
and
Earn Big Money!



Wireless operators visit the world's most interesting places—Paris, London, Venice, Shanghai, Sidney, Valparaiso—cities in every corner of the globe—in Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa and South America! Now YOU can know first hand the mysterious far-off lands you've dreamed of. You can enjoy the pleasure and education of travel—not as a hurried tourist, but as a ship's officer with plenty of spare time on board ship and freedom in port to explore each new land. And for this fascinating, easy work, you will receive splendid pay—*in addition to your keep!*

Get into the field of radio now. From all over the world comes the call for men trained in Radio. Never has a field offered such glorious opportunities—both on land and on sea. And now in a short time you can easily fit yourself for one of these positions.

Easy Now To Qualify For Government Radio License At Home In Spare Time

The key to all the best-paid positions in radio is the Government First Class Radio License. Every operator on a ship, in a commercial land station, or in a broadcasting station should have it. Every radio inspector, engineer, and installation expert should have it. This license is the Radio Expert's *degree.* It opens up to him all the wonderful opportunities in his profession.

You can easily qualify for this license—right in your home during spare time. You don't have to know a thing about electricity or radio to start. The National Radio Institute, America's first and largest Radio School, has perfected a home-study method of teaching radio which starts at the very simplest fundamentals of electricity and radio and takes you up to a point where you are qualified for the First Class Radio License.

Many of the American wireless operators on land and sea are graduates of this home-study course of the National Radio Institute!

An extraordinary feature of this home-study course is the use of four specially patented instruments, owned exclusively by this Institute. These instruments, included with the course, give practical training in radio operation, and enable the student to develop a high speed in transmitting and receiving code, required to obtain the first class license.

Send for Our New Booklet

Hundreds of big-pay positions are open to National Radio Institute graduates. Whether you want to travel or prefer an attractive land job, there is a wonderful opportunity for you in this fascinating, rapidly growing field. Send for our new booklet "Your Opportunity in Radio," which describes the remarkable openings in Radio and how you can qualify for them. Mail the coupon today.

NOTE—These opportunities are open only to those over 18 years of age. Boys under 18 write for special opportunities open to them—spare time opportunities for making big money in radio after school hours and during vacation.

NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE

Department 17-H Washington, D. C.

National Radio Institute
Radio Headquarters
Dept. 17-H, Washington, D. C.

Please send me your catalogue, "Your Opportunity in Radio," describing your Home-Study Course which will qualify me to become a certified Radiotrician and positions open to me when qualified.

Name ....

Street ....

City.............................State................

WHITING-ADAMS
BRUSHES

A brush expert says they are the best Hair Brushes made. They are penetrating. They go all through the hair to the roots and stimulate growth. They make a beautiful radiant sheen. The glory of woman is made more glorious with Whiting-Adams Hair Brushes.

Send for Illustrated Literature
JOHN L. WHITING-J. J. ADAMS CO.
Boston, U. S. A.
Brush Manufacturers for Over 114 Years and the Largest in the World

89

SELL US YOUR SPARE · TIME ·

You can earn $15 to $50 a week writing show cards in your own home.—No canvassing.—A pleasant profitable profession easily and quickly learnt by our new simple graphic block system. Artistic ability not necessary.—We teach you how, and supply you with work.—Distance no object. Full particulars and booklet free.

WILSON METHODS LIMITED—DEPT. F
64 East Richmond, Toronto, Canada

MAKE MONEY
$ AT HOME $

YOU can earn from $1 to $2 an hour in your spare time writing show cards. Quickly and easily learned by our new, simple "Instructograph" method. No canvassing or soliciting; we teach you how, guarantee you steady work at home no matter where you live, and pay you cash each week.

Full particulars and Booklet Free.
AMERICAN SHOW CARD SCHOOL
108 Ryrie Building **Toronto, Can.**

For 58 years these little marchers have led band instrument buyers to better quality and value!

Everything for the BAND PLAYER!

—from a drumstick to world's finest instruments! Used by Liberati, Army, Navy, Victor Record Makers. SEND FOR FREE CATALOG: mention Instrument interests YOU. *Free Trial!!* Easy payments. Sold by leading music merchants everywhere. Write TODAY!

LYON & HEALY, 72-74 Jackson Boulevard, CHICAGO

Whittemore's
Shoe Polishes

WHITTEMORE BROS & CO.
FOR ALL KINDS OF BLACK SHOES
OIL PASTE
BLACKS, POLISHES AND PRESERVES
BOSTON, U.S.A.
FROM FREEZING

Only one of the many Whittemore Superior Polishes and Cleaners to keep shoes looking new.

AMAZING OFFER on UNDERWOODS

Only $3.00 down puts a Shipman-Ward Rebuilt Underwood in your home or office. Try it; test it in every way for ten days. If you can tell it from a brand new Underwood in looks, action or quality of work, return it and we'll refund every cent paid by you. If you decide to keep it, pay the balance in easy monthly payments and make a big saving in price. We guarantee the machine five years. Act now—send for free book and full particulars.

Only $3 DOWN

Shipman-Ward Mfg. Co.
Typewriter Emporium
C268 Shipman Building, Montrose and Ravenswood Avenues, Chicago

Let *Us* Pay for Your Summer Vacation

Scores of men are paying for their vacations with money earned in their spare time with our money-making plan. You can do the same very easily. For further particulars

Turn to page 2 or write

Manager, Staff Agencies Division, Box 977, Butterick Building, New York City

$25 A DAY *Selling Shirts*

Large shirt manufacturer wants agents to sell complete line of shirts, pajamas, and night shirts direct to wearer. Advertised brand—exclusive patterns—easy to sell. No experience or capital required. Entirely new proposition.

Write for free samples.
Madison Shirt Co., 503 Broadway, N.Y.C.

I Will Give You a Chance To Earn $200 a Week

RIGHT now, today, I offer you an opportunity to be your own boss—to work just as many hours a day as you please—to start when you want to and quit when you want to—and earn $200 a week.

These Are Facts

Does that sound too good to be true? If it does, then let me tell you what J. R. Head did in a small town in Kansas. Head lives in a town of 631 people. He was sick, broke, out of a job. He accepted my offer. I gave him the same chance I am now offering you. At this new work he has made as high as $69.50 for one day's work. You can do every bit as well as he did. If that isn't enough, then let me tell you about E. A. Sweet of Michigan. He was an electrical engineer and didn't know anything about selling. In his first month's spare time he earned $243. Inside of six months he was making between $600 and $1,200 a month.

W. J. McCrary is another man I want to tell you about. His regular job paid him $2 a day, but this wonderful new work has enabled him to make $9,000 a year. Yes, and right this very minute you are being offered the same proposition that has made these men so successful. Do you want it? Do you want to earn $40 a day?

A Clean, High-grade Dignified Business

Have you ever heard of Comer All-Weather Coats? They are advertised in all the leading magazines. A good - looking, stylish coat that's good for summer or winter—that keeps out wind, rain or snow, a coat that everybody should have, made of fine materials for men, women and children, and sells for less than the price of an ordinary coat.

Now Comer Coats are not sold in stores. All our orders come through our own representatives. Within the next few months we will pay representatives more than three hundred thousand dollars for sending us orders.

J. R. HEAD

And now I'm offering you the chance to become our representative in your territory and get **your** share of that three hundred thousand dollars. All you do is to take orders. We do the rest. We deliver. We collect and you get your money the same day you take the order.

You can see how simple it is. We furnish you with a complete outfit and tell you how to get the business in your territory. We help you to get started. If you only send us six average orders a day, which you can easily get, you will make $100 a week.

Maybe You Are Worth $1,000 a Month

Well, here is your chance to find out, for this is the same proposition that enabled George Garon to make a clear profit of $40 in his first day's work—the same proposition that gave R. W. Krieger $20 net profit in a half hour. It is the same opportunity that gave A. B. Spencer $625 cash for one month's spare time.

If you mail the coupon at the bottom of this ad I will show you the easiest, quickest, simplest plan for making money that you ever heard of. If you are interested in a chance to earn $200 a week and can devote all your time or only an hour or so a day to my proposition, write your name down below, cut out the coupon and mail it to me at once. You take no risk, and this may be the one outstanding opportunity of your life to earn more money than you ever thought possible.

Find Out NOW!

Remember, it doesn't cost you a penny. You don't agree to anything and you will have a chance to go right out and make big money. Do it. Don't wait. Get full details. Mail the coupon now.

C. E. COMER,
THE COMER MFG. CO.
Dept. C-64, Dayton, Ohio

Just Mail This NOW!

THE COMER MFG. CO.
Dept. C-64, Dayton, Ohio

Please tell me how I can make $200 a week as your representative. Send me complete details of your offer without any obligation to me whatsoever.

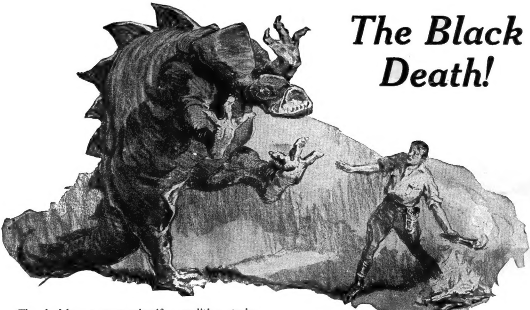
Name..............................

Address............................

....

(Print or write plainly)

The Black Death!



They had been sent—a scientific expedition—to investigate vague rumors of prehistoric animal life in the vast reaches of the Amazon, where fifty thousand miles of waterway run through swamps and forests the size of Europe.

And they had found—*this!*

No wonder only vague rumors had reached the outside world. No wonder the Indians believed the Evil Spirit of the Woods dwelt there. How could any man—any weapon—prevail against such fierce monsters as these?

Yet one man dared it—one man braved those Evil Spirits—for the riches that lay behind them and the girl that waited back home for him.

He tried—and succeeded—but when he got back—

Conan Doyle tells the story—the strangest, weirdest, most fascinating tale he has ever written. Dramatized in film form, it stirred the whole movie world. For a few days only, you can get it, together with his two latest volumes of Sherlock Holmes stories—ABSOLUTELY FREE—with your set of

MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

This is the first collected edition of Mary Roberts Rinehart's best stories ever published, and naturally she wants it to be a success. In order to enable us to make you a real "before-the-war" price on these fascinating volumes—in order to make this first edition go like wild-fire—she has agreed to accept exactly one-tenth of her usual rate of royalty on one edition of 10,000 sets.

Paper prices have come down, labor costs are lower, and now, with this generous concession of Mrs. Rinehart's, we can make you a price on this one edition actually lower than the pre-war price—just about half what these same volumes would cost in a book-store, and in addition, if your order comes in at once, we will send you the three latest and best volumes of

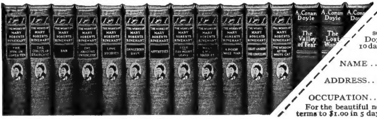
CONAN DOYLE—*FREE!*

Think of it—the best works of two of the highest paid writers that ever lived—12 volumes of Mary Roberts Rinehart, for just one of which a great magazine paid $30,000—and 3 volumes of Conan Doyle—all yours for just about half what they would cost you in any book-store. And you can pay for them, if you like, at the rate of only 25c a week.

This is your chance. Send the coupon, without money. Get these 15 volumes for a week's FREE examination. If they are not the best stories you ever read—if you don't read them and reread them—send them back at our expense.

But mail the coupon today. The offer of Conan Doyle's best Sherlock Holmes stories FREE holds good only as long as the special first edition of Rinehart lasts. Send your coupon NOW—today! ***Tomorrow may be too late.***

REVIEW OF REVIEWS CORP., 30 Irving Place, New York



Adv. 8-30-23

Review of Reviews Corp., 30 Irving Place, New York

Send me on approval, charges paid by you, the 12 volumes of Mary Roberts Rinehart's best stories. Also the 3-volume set of Conan Doyle's latest stories. If I keep the books I will send you $1.50 in 5 days, and then $1.00 a month for 15 months for the Rinehart set only and keep the 3 volumes of Doyle FREE. Otherwise I will, within 10 days, return both sets at your expense.

NAME ....

ADDRESS ....

OCCUPATION ....

For the beautiful new Artcraft Binding, just change the terms to $1.00 in 5 days and $2.00 a month for 10 months.

OUR MISSION

in life is to make our guests so comfortable amidst surroundings of happiness and cheerfulness, that forever after when they come to Cincinnati they will look upon The Sinton as their home.

And, as they travel from place to place, to judge other hotels using us as a criterion.

Or, to recommend to others the same hospitality that they received.

HOTEL
Sinton
MANAGEMENT ~ JOHN L. HORGAN

CINCINNATI

A hotel of character in the city of character

Accommodations for 1200 guests

Every room with bath and servidor

$6.95
$25 VAL.

THE FINEST 25 CAL. AUTOMATIC MADE

TRIPLE SAFETY
FAMOUS GRIP SQUEEZE SAFETY

The highest type 25 cal. automatic made—with three safeties—is this new improved **vest pocket model** of drop forge blue steel, very well made. Shoots seven shots. Our **No. DA 119** at only **$6.95.**

20 Shot 32 cal. double safety military model, 10 shots with extra magazine making 20 shots in all. Our **No. DA 120,** special at **$9.75.** Both sizes shoot any standard cartridge. **PAY POSTMAN ON DELIVERY** plus postage.

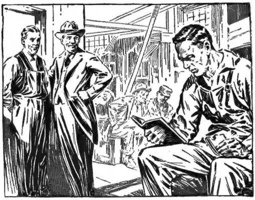
Money back promptly if Not Satisfied.

CONSUMERS CO., Dept. DA, 1265 Broadway, N. Y.

EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can make $15 to $60 weekly in your spare time writing show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We instruct you by our new simple Directograph system, pay you cash each week and guarantee you steady work. Write for full particulars and free booklet.

WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE
204 Colborne Building **Toronto, Can.**



"There's One Man We're Going to Keep"

"Ed Wilson, there, is one of the most ambitious men in the plant. I notice that he never fools away his spare time. He studies his International Correspondence Schools Course every chance he gets.

"It's been the making of him, too. He hasn't been here nearly so long as Tom Downey, who was laid off yesterday, but he knows ten times as much about this business.

"I'm going to give him Tom's job at a raise in salary. He's the kind of man we want around here."

HOW do you stand in your shop or office? Are you an Ed Wilson or a Tom Downey? Are you going up? Or down?

No matter where you live, the International Correspondence Schools will come to you. No matter what your handicaps or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply-written, wonderfully-illustrated I. C. S. textbooks make it easy to learn.

This is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, put it up to us to prove how we can help you. Just mark and mail this coupon.

— — — — — — — TEAR OUT HERE — — — — — — —

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2019-D, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Personnel Organization
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Banking and Banking Law
- ☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)
- ☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Business Spanish ☐ French
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Better Letters
- ☐ Foreign Trade
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineer
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ Civil Engineer
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Metallurgy ☐ Mining
- ☐ Steam Engineering
- ☐ Radio ☐ Airplane Engines
- ☐ Architect
- ☐ Blue Print Reading
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ Plumbing and Heating
- ☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Automobile Work
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Agriculture and Poultry
- ☐ Mathematics

Name..

3-27-23

Street Address..

City.. State..

Occupation..

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Are You Happy?

ASK a hundred people what they want most in the world and the answer is likely to be —Happiness. To some, Happiness is represented by riches or fame. To others, leisure spells Happiness. But all agree that there can be no real Happiness without Health.

Summer is the time to build for Health and Happiness—the time of vacations. Long days to rest in—to play in—to dream in.

Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn were the ideal vacationists. They took a vacation whether they needed it or not—and had *fun*.

—This is what a real vacation means. To vacate your old environments, your regular occupation—your everyday self and have a complete change.

To do the things that will fill you brimful of energy and "pep".

In planning your vacation—and of course you will take one—try to get away from the things you have been doing all year and do the opposite.

The Postman Does Not Need a Walk—

He needs a hammock and a lazy time. The town man needs the quiet of the country—the country man needs the stimulus of the town.

The mountaineer needs the ocean—the lowlander needs the hills. Women who keep house should board—and girls who never see a kitchen throughout the year should camp out and get their own meals.

One man needs solitude—another needs company.

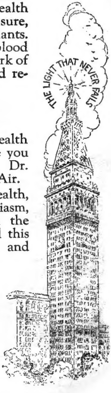
Think of your own needs and plan the vacation that will do you most good.

New ideas—new scenes—new people—all this is recreation. And recreation is necessary to Health and Happiness. Joy, pleasure, laughter are mental stimulants. They increase the flow of blood and so aid in the first work of building up the body and repairing wasted tissues.

Miracle-Workers—

There are two famous health doctors whom we advise you to consult. They are Dr. Sunshine and Dr. Fresh Air.

If you want more health, more energy, more enthusiasm, more earning power in the days to come, play hard this month of August—play and be happy.


THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

During the past few years a great new movement has been growing all over the country—the movement to provide recreation and outdoor amusements for the thousands of men, women and children who live in towns, villages and thickly populated cities. This vacation movement has been carried along by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. In 1922 many of our district managers arranged jolly old-fashioned picnics for their local policyholders.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company is so strongly in sympathy with this movement that it has prepared a booklet, "What One Town Did", that tells just how to go about the work of providing adequate recreation centers.

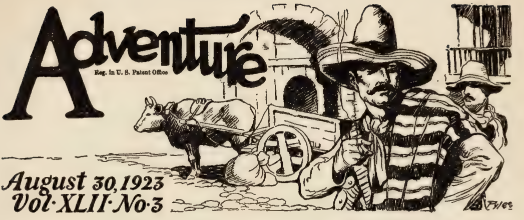
Please send for it and help enlist the interest of your neighbors in plans for building health in your town.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

Published by

METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY—NEW YORK

Biggest in the World, More Assets, More Policyholders, More Insurance in force, More new Insurance each year


Adventure
Reg. in U. S. Patent Office

August 30,1923
Vol·XLII·No·3

Published Three Times a Month by The Ridgway Company

J. H. GANNON, President — C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - - - New York, N. Y.
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in advance — **Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents**

Foreign postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian Postage, 90 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered; Copyright, 1923, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. Entered at Stationers' Hall, London, England.

The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Contents for August 30th, 1923, Issue

The Moment of Greatness *A Complete Novel* . . . . . **Thomson Burtis** 3
Southwest—the sky patrol.

The Tiger Kid . . . . **Frederick Moore** 81
Sea—*Capt. Coddles* hires a magician.

Slants on Life *Two-Fisted Sermon* . . . . **Bill Adams** 87

Reputation . . . . **W. C. Tuttle** 88
Mexican border—the bandit from the storm.

The Trial of a Timid Man *A Complete Novelette* . . . . **William Ashley Anderson** 92
China—he was afraid of dirt.

Fombombo *A Four-Part Story Part II* . . . . . . **T. S. Stribling** 111
South America—the dictator assaults San Geronimo.

Broadcast . . . . **Will H. Grattan** 144
West—a mine, a crook—and a radio.

Hidden Guns . . . . **Henry W. Patterson** 148
North Woods—snowbound.

Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

Swain's Vengeance *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **Arthur D. Howden Smith** 154
Orkney Islands—a raid from the dragon ship.

The Camp-Fire **A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers** 178

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 183

Ask Adventure 184

Radio 186

Mining and Prospecting 186

Old Songs That Men Have Sung 186

Weapons, Past and Present 186

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing 186

Tropical Forestry 186

Aviation 186

Lost Trails 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . **V. E. Pyles**

Cover Design . . . . **H. C. Murphy**

Four Complete Novelettes

THE winds that beat on the blind baggage of an express train driving fifty miles an hour through the storm were not enough to cool *Brooklyn Joe's* resolve to spend one more Christmas at home. Then he rolled into Seneca Yard and met up with *Spider McFale* and his "front," and *Hooky* of the Barrel House and his subtle ally, and realized that his struggle had just begun. "MOONSHINE MADNESS," by Max Bonter, is one of the complete novelettes in the next issue.

IN THE far north of America when French and English divided the land, a crew of cutthroats and pirates found a new leader. One man with the ideal of freedom, a dozen with the ideal of gold, they set forth to find a wrecked ship wherein lay treasure beyond dreams of avarice. "THE STAR OF DREAMS," a complete novelette, by H. Bedford-Jones, in the next issue.

"HE WAS the fightin'est rooster of them all," and when a match was staged in Porto Cortez the crew of the *Maggie May* bet their shirts and all the cash on hand. The straggly old cock looked as if he would be an easy victim for the thoroughbreds, and then strange things happened. "THE TALE OF A ROOSTER," a complete novelette by William P. Barron in the next issue.

McCORD went to the Fijis to bring *Edwards*, the beachcomber, back to his wife. But *Edwards*, while celebrating his discovery of rich pearl-beds, was killed in a drunken brawl. To prevent the pearls from falling into the hands of the men who had killed his friend, *McCord*—aided by the planter, *Gideon*—fought mightily against whites and natives. "SMOKE ISLAND," by J. Allan Dunn, a complete novelette in the next issue.

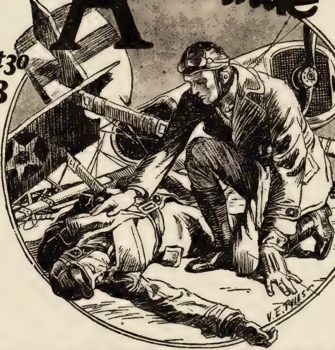
Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

Adventure

August 30 1923

Vol. XLII No. 3



THE MOMENT *of* GREATNESS

A Complete Novel by Thomson Burtis

Author of "Groody Hesitates Awhile," "Flight," etc.

THE great adventure legend of the American people is, and probably always will be, the winning of the frontier. Around the pioneers who were moulded and made for that task there has been a halo of romance, and rightly so. Few men, even those whose life has been that of the city, have failed to thrill to the stories of the hard-riding, hard-fighting, straight-shooting westerners who, as cattlemen, Rangers, sheriffs or outlaws carried on the struggle of the old West.

Through the printed word there are numberless terms which automatically bring up visions of romantic adventure. The bare mention of the border, the Pecos, cattle-rustler, two-gunman; even commonplace descriptive terms like mesa and arroyo, carry with them a thousand associations which swarm in the average American's mind as the incarnation of the spirit which made his country.

The appeal of it is increased by distance. Even the most provincial easterner will tell you that those days are gone. And, generally speaking, he is right.

But not altogether so. There is a strip which spans the southern border, and included in its millions of acres there are some of the last remnants of the old-time West. There are endless vistas of mesquite, billowing up to the very walls of El Paso, and in those fastnesses there lurk outlaws, and also the forces of the law, and the struggle of the border often times goes on gun to gun. The Big Bend merges into towering, deserted

Copyright, 1923, by The Ridgway Company, in the United States and Great Britain. All rights reserved.

mountains, and they in turn flatten out gradually into the trackless, flaming deserts of the far southwest. The border is now a country of strange contrasts—of modern civilization and trackless wastes; of shrewd business men and sombreroed old-timers; of modern industry and gun-toting badmen.

But there is a still more bizarre contrast down there—more striking than the spectacle of a booted and sombreroed cowman taking advantage of the beautiful modernity and convenience of the Del Norte in El Paso. For there on the border the two extremes meet. On the ground, for hundreds of miles, the unsubdued wastes which have scarcely changed since the Alamo; and above them, from coast to coast, twentieth century pioneers ride range on the tempestuous frontier—by air. Twice a day great ton-and-a-half airplanes, hurtling through the air at a hundred miles an hour, patrol the Rio Grande.

And the hundred-odd young men of the border patrol are the successors of the young riders of former decades whose lives have been the inspiration for Odyseys of American adventure. Instead of wiry cow-ponies they ride roaring steeds which are the fruit of man's latest and greatest conquest. And just as the pioneers of old were the embodiment of supreme skill in their ability to ride and shoot and rope, so are these aerial riders unmatched in their ability to handle the strange new forces which they control. Instead of chaps and spurs the men of the border patrol wear the khaki breeches and trim field-boots of the Army Air Service, and in the place of the long-barreled six-shooters of an older day Colt .45s snuggle in their holsters. There are other outward differences: these new bordermen are not the products of their raw environment, but largely college men selected for physical perfection, which is the fundamental requirement of the airman, plus rarer endowments which have been tested and tried in the acid of war and four years of hazardous service.

But fundamentally they are of the breed of the hard-working, hard-playing, reckless riders of the old days, for in them are the same qualities which came to grips with life in the raw, and subdued it. And they are following the lure of high adventure, and glory in the fact that the cloistered halls and roaring cities have been left behind for the greater joys of a service which unites the romance of today with that of yesterday.

It would be a very matter-of-fact man who could remain unimpressed with a life which holds such vivid contrasts and constant hazard. It is a matter of historic fact that less than three years ago two flyers emerged from hours of life-and-death struggle with a faulty ship into familiar border experience of capture by Mexican brigands, and days of wandering in the mountains, of attempted escape, and of frequent moments when life swung in the balance before rescue came. The story of those days is exactly the tale of many men of forty years ago. And nowadays the ships of the patrol come back to the air-dromes with bullet holes in them from the guns of smugglers or rustlers or others of the ilk which fear and hate the patrol.

Naturally the few years of the patrol's existence have brought forth many tales of high success and honorable failure. Over ten per cent. of the flyers die a violent death every year in line of hazardous duty. Tex MacDowell of the patrol, almost single-handed, dethroned and lodged in jail the most powerful outlaw on the border, and other criminals too numerous to mention have found khaki-clad young men in airplanes to be winged Nemeses. Many of the stories can never be told, for government agents often accomplish their greatest feats in secrecy. Many of the moves in the international game must remain buried in the memories of a few anonymous participants and the most secret of Washington archives.

One of the episodes of the patrol which will probably always stand out as at once the expression of the spirit of the service and an inspiration for the future concerns the Duke, Tex MacDowell, and Graves.

The Duke—Robert Daly—the baffling young Kentuckian who blazed a trail as brief as it was brilliant for his fellows to follow; Tex MacDowell, the lounging young Southerner who, by force of circumstance and individual ability, fought his way upward until he was generally considered the brightest star of a picked outfit; Graves, one of those servants of the country whose achievements are always anonymous, and rarely if ever realized by the millions of people whom they serve.

And what they were had as much to do with all that happened as what they did.

II

WHAT might be called the molding of Robert Daly began, in his own mind, on his twelfth birthday. Of course, his boyhood previous to that milestone had been lived under conditions which had something to do with future events, but he was not conscious of them.

It was after the birthday dinner that his father, Judge Daly, called his slim, rather overgrown son into his study. The judge was six feet tall and built in proportion. He had a thick head of shaggy black hair, and an eye that could, and frequently did, blaze with unholy wrath. The reaction from those terrible fits of temper was always a soft-hearted repentance which took the form of unreasoning indulgence of the former object of his anger.

"Son," said the Judge expansively, lighting a cigar with deliberation, "looking back on my own experience I am moved to make your training somewhat different from the average. As a starter, on this twelfth birthday of yours, I am going to tell you not to do, when you grow up, three things which I know you will do when you grow up."

The boy, who loved his father devotedly and feared him a good deal, listened calmly while his impressive parent discoursed on wine, women and gambling. From that day on his education along those lines was continuous. He had an allowance of ten dollars a week, and two nights a week he played poker with his father, at a ten cent limit. Quarter was neither asked nor given. What Bob lost came out of his allowance, and there was no replacement. What he won was added thereto without question. He learned the essential facts of life and sex, and of things to be avoided. His father, a *bon vivant* in his earlier and more unregenerate days, was constantly impressing on his son the fact that one must be a gentleman always in his relations with the other sex and in his cups.

The boy had already shown himself the possessor of a brilliant mind and an untamed spirit. He had jogged into high school, without effort, at the age of eleven. His studies were mere bagatelles to him, although he announced early in his educational career that a lot of them, such as Latin and higher mathematics, were junk as far as he was concerned.

And during those high school years he went through the first steps of a different sort of education—one which left its mark on him for life. He was spindling and awkward, and years younger than his associates. Never in his life had he had an intimate acquaintance with any boy his own age. His normal mental habitat lay higher. And on the athletic fields of one of the Louisville High Schools, for four fierce, bloody, raging years, he strove to take his place alongside the heavier, older athletes.

How he did it no one, least of all the coaches, quite knew, but he made his letters in baseball, basketball and football. With a savage fierceness that would not be denied he overcame the handicaps of youth and lack of weight and strength by the sheer viciousness of his play. He was bruised and sore fully six months out of the year. One of the memories of the famous Thanksgiving Day game between High and Manual High Schools which will never be forgotten by those who saw it was the play of the slim Daly at end during his last year.

Play after play he hurled himself in the path of the thundering, heavy backfield men who constantly sought to swoop around the supposed weak spot in the opposing line. The slender body was hurled sideways at the menacing cleats, and never a run got by, until weariness got the best of him. When the coach, who had put Daly in against his better judgment, started to take him out the youngster's eyes blazed with a maniacal light as he half-sobbed:

"I will *not* go out!"

And for some reason the coach left him in, until five minutes after the start of the second half Daly quietly keeled over in his tracks. His body, when they rubbed him down, was like one living sore.

Despite the fact that he made the grade, those were four years of boyish tragedy—of over-exertion to keep pace with his elders and superiors, and success was wrung from fate by physical torture and mental agony. He had a persistent consciousness of inferiority, never realizing that his brain had outstripped his body.

There were other things which set him apart from the average, and which were partly responsible for the fact that he had no real intimates save one or two much older youths. He was an omnivorous reader, along peculiar lines. Adventure stories did not appeal to him, and juvenile books were trash. Modern novels, some of the classics, although not many, and books of a literary and artistic bent claimed his interest. Toward the end of his high-school career he became noted for his bizarre viewpoint and unconventional outbursts regarding commonly accepted things.

What was merely an ungovernable temper in his father was, in the son, what the high-school principal who expelled him six months before he would have graduated, denominated an "untamable spirit." There were periodic outbreaks against law and order, conducted in a laughing, devil-may-care way which seemed to indicate a precocious disrespect for the ideas of his elders and the law and the Prophets. No one quite understood him—by the very fact of his youth and his habit of mind he was thrown upon himself, and had already become introspective and isolated from his fellows.

The expulsion was the signal for one of the Judge's outbreaks of temper; an unusually severe one which the weeping Mrs. Daly could not divert. At the close of the Judge's introductory tirade the fifteen-year-old Robert, tall and slim and flaming-eyed, walked out of the house without a hat, with less than five dollars in his pocket, and did not return.

Just outside of Davenport, Iowa, grimy with coal dust and half-starved, he ran into "Bushy" Brennan, knight of the road and petty criminal. Bushy saw in the good-looking youth a most useful "gay cat" a bit older than the average hobo's kid, but nevertheless a profitable investment. For two weeks Daly, with clean face and hands, applied at farmhouse doors for a meal, for which he stated he was willing to work, and then told a tale of leaving school, working his way home to his sick mother, and so on ad infinitum. Usually the good-looking youngster heard the mistress of the house say:

"Why, you poor boy! Come right in—"

"I—I have a sort of friend with me who's been good to me—" the boy would say diffidently, and usually a prompt invitation to the "friend" would follow. Then would appear the evil, bearded, red-eyed Brennan to partake of the bounty secured by Daly.

The life of a hobo is much more interesting to talk about later than it is to live through. To the sheltered there is often the urge to the open road and the blooming countryside and gleaming fires at dusk while traveled, genial vagabonds loll about, eat their mulligan and chat of far places and interesting adventures. To Daly it was a life of monotonous sordidness, of cursing trainmen, of squalid crime and evil obscenity. He came to know of a degeneracy so low that it may not even be hinted at, for one night in Nebraska he fought like a wildcat against the drunken Brennan, finally ending the struggle by crushing the vicious hobo's skull with a handy log.

He never knew that Brennan, unwept, unhonored and unhung, died three days later. By that time Daly was up around the Great Lakes, and one morning strolled into a clearing along the edge of the water to gaze interestedly at regular rows of tents, a frame building of fair size, and a big dining tent where about forty boys were absorbing nutriment with speed and precision.

A kind-eyed man of middle age greeted him cordially, invited him to breakfast, and sought to make conversation. Daly told a well-knit story of himself; how he lived in Chicago and was just on a walking trip. The Boy Scout man was interested when he finally turned the conversation into general channels and glimpsed something of the active brain and considerable knowledge of the youth before him, and before the morning was over Daly had accepted a job as second assistant to the chief for the next month, at ten dollars a week and board.

There was little for him to do, so he read twelve hours out of twenty-four. Strangely assorted magazines found their way into his tent.

He looked eighteen, now, and the gray eyes and clean-lined face, tanned to a golden bronze, had hardened slightly. He found that the kindly scoutmaster had never been five hundred miles from Chicago in his life, and was possessed of a platitudinous mind which held room for nothing beyond his home, his business, politics and work for boys. Toward the end of the month he met one of the rural secretaries of the Y. M. C. A., interested him, and was finally offered a job as a species of caretaker for a boys' club in Vraley, Michigan. His duties would be to see that the reading-room and gymnasium were orderly and well kept—the town had simply dedicated a house and gymnasium, and no one was interested enough to formulate any program at all.

Daly took the job, and held it for four months—four months curiously like the years of high school, in many ways. For the "boys' club" had become a haunt of young toughs to whom the young caretaker was less than nothing. Vraley was an industrial town, and the roughnecks of the place had taken complete possession of the "club." Words failing, Daly fought them—night after night there were hours of nightmare. It was a lone-handed struggle against conditions, without so much as a friend to help. There came a night in the gymnasium when Daly, half-sobbing in his wrath at his tormentors, seized a heavy chair and started down the line. There was order for the next three days, but the fourth day found Robert Daly a member of the Brew Brothers' Minstrels, which had played in the town hall.

One of Daly's accomplishments always had been singing. He had been a soprano-soloist as a boy, and now that his voice had changed was possessed of a freak double voice. He could sing both soprano and barytone, both of them well, and the combination gave him a "yodel" which was unusual. The Brew Brothers' show snapped him up at thirty dollars a week and cakes, and he bade Vraley goodby.

During all this time it was characteristic of the shy, quiet youth that he had been writing to his mother regularly, spinning fictional yarns of how happy and successful he was. He had also warned her that he would not come back to live at home, and it was an indication of his parents' opinion of him that no effort was made to force him.

With the Brew show he played a long series of one-night stands. Once in a while there would come a three-day stand, but the show was a turkey outfit and made no play for the bigger towns. Daly rather enjoyed it, but found no friends. He was the youngest performer by twenty years, and had nothing in common with the twenty-five stage failures who composed the two-for-a-cent troupe.

That is, outside of poker. His father's tutelage stood him in good stead now.

"I'm saving you thousands of dollars by teaching you now," the judge had been wont to say, and now Daly appreciated that fact vividly.

It was poker as much as anything that gradually toned down the razzing he had received during the first weeks. Despite the tan on his face, its inherent intellectual quality and the sensitiveness of it gave him, at this time, almost an effeminate appearance at first glance. Some of the actors started calling him "Jane." But the fact that "Jane" of the slim body and clear yodel took their money at poker and that he stood up and fought "Fatty" Masters, end man and one-time pugilist, until Masters finally knocked him into a bloody, unconscious heap, finally stopped the Jane business.

"Lightning-foot" Jackson, star dancer of the show, attached himself to Daly, and provided the only real companionship Daly had aside from books and Lightning-foot was no intellectual prodigy. He did spin interesting yarns of the show business, and Daly learned much of life of a certain kind. Before the season ended in Massachusetts Jackson had borrowed from Daly over two hundred dollars, and in answer to Daly's demand after the last show mentioned a vague bankroll in the hands of his wife, and said that he'd send the money when he got home. The seventeen-year old youngster left the show with little but contempt for any member of it.

Thirty dollars a week plus his poker winnings had left him the sum of two hundred dollars and three suits of clothes. Obeying a sudden impulse, he took a summer course at Harvard. It was a peculiar hodge-podge; literature, psychology and Spanish. At the end of the course he had no money, practically speaking, but he had heard from a casual classmate that in a little college at Springfield, Massachusetts, there was a professor who had been president of a great university, and whose courses along the line of psychology were wonderful.

With ten dollars in his pocket Daly signed a note for his tuition, studied, read, and worked himself to the bone merely to live. Every moment of his day was occupied—he was like a man apart from the rest of college life. He could overhear occasional remarks sometimes to the accompaniment of contemptuous laughter, referring to himself as "a queer dick taking a special course—awful grind——"

He stoked furnaces, drove a taxicab, sold books from house to house. In the latter occupation, which was one of the first he tried, he was rudely repulsed on an average of twice or three times a day. He was different from the hot-tempered boy who had started away from home, though—he took the insults quietly, without wrath, but with a curious, precocious contempt for the vulgarity of those who offered them.

Finally he gave up that occupation, and started working Saturdays in a huge public market, where he sold meats. Often his only food that day was a piece of raw meat which he would hide in the pocket of his white coat, taking a mouthful when opportunity offered. At one time he went two and a half days without food.

In his introspective moods, which were frequent, his mind groped to the conclusion that it was he, Robert Daly, against the world. His sensitive spirit had been bruised and thrown in upon itself too much. He had more and more withdrawn into a sufficient-unto-myself attitude, and since the day he had left home he could think of no human being to whom he had not been of more value than the man himself had to Daly.

To Brennan he had been a gold mine. Practically every ounce of the food eaten by the bearded hobo had been secured by Daly, and also more than half of the money they had got their hands on. For forty dollars a month he had gone through that torture in Vraley—the supporters of the "club" could not have hired another man to do what he had done for less than twice the money.

As for the Brew show—to them he had been worth more than twice as much as they paid him. As an indication of his curious gift for self-appraisal, however, it may be said that he was under no illusions as to why he had been worth so much more than they had paid him, and he did not preen himself on his professional skill. It is an axiom of the show business that a good yodel will always knock 'em off their seats; and it will in a Broadway musical comedy just as quickly as at the Three Forks Opera House.

Toward the end of the season Daly had seen his name go up on the flamboyant posters of the show, and night after night his songs in the minstrel first part and his ten minutes as a "single" in the olio stopped the show cold. Billed as the "boy wonder" he grew into the show's feature—at thirty-five a week and cakes. On the personal side, not a member of the show had done him a favor which amounted to anything, and the Brew brothers and Lightning-foot Dawson had exploited him.

It was at this time—aloof, withdrawn, shabbily dressed that he made the acquaintance of a man in Springfield who introduced him to a poker game which ran regularly in one of the smaller hotels. From that time on Daly's path was a smooth one, as far as finances went. Shortly he emerged into a rather boldly handsome, well-groomed young student who had no intimates but was an increasing source of interest to the collegians. He found no real friend. Being introspective, he became conscious of the fact that he was always putting out tentacles of friendship, only to find that the men with whom he was thrown were not of the type who could interest him.

His brief experience in the hard school of the road had made him curiously older than his associates, and the natural trend of his mind was foreign to their interests and methods of thought.

The days were full of reminders of how much he had changed. Athletics, his boyhood fetish, meant nothing to him. He knew that he could make both the baseball and basketball teams, but after poker gave him leisure enough to try for them he had no interest in them whatever. The prestige he would gain through getting his letter, the applause of the crowds, meant absolutely nothing—which is an abnormal attitude on the part of a youth in his late teens.

The most significant personal contact of his life came during that year, however, in the person of the bald, gaunt, choleric Professor Ballen, he who taught psychology and the history of civilization as though inspired. His classes stimulated a natural faculty which Daly, even as a boy, had possessed in some degree; that of independent thought. No matter how hoary with age or custom a certain belief might be, it was Daly's habit to look it over without attaching any significance to the fact that it was commonly accepted. Consequently, he held many peculiar and bizarre ideas.

Professor Ballen came to be interested in this unusual student, and there were many talks in the savant's study in which the time passed rapidly for Daly, and he never left without feeling that his mental fibers had been toughened and stimulated.

On the whole, he was as contented as he had ever been. Curiously enough, he had taken no thought of the future. He had a vague idea that there were thousands of miles of world and a lot of interesting things to do. The idea of a profession, or even of a job, never entered his mind. They were things which held no interest for him.

Then came the blow-off. The game had been running regularly, and until two o'clock each morning Daly played, and won. Another member of the game was also a student at the college. He was named Ralph Bergen, and he was the son of a German millionaire who owned a string of lunch-rooms all through New England. Bergen usually got drunk during a game, and lost heavily.

One night in the early spring of 1914 Daly's luck was unusual, and Bergen, his heavy face flushed and lowering, was on the little end of the stick frequently. There finally came a pot which Daly won from Bergen, with four queens against four fours, and Daly was dealing.

"This game's crooked!" rasped Bergen thickly, pointing at Daly.

Without a word Daly, his eyes dancing with a cold flame, slapped the fleshy young German across the mouth. The other players, apprehensive of the noise, held them both.

"I'll report this to the college tomorrow!" threatened Bergen viciously, and Daly, who knew his man, was well aware of the fact that it would be a typical revenge.

"You're nothing but a —— liar, in addition to a yellow-livered poor sport," Daly remarked and laughed into the convulsed face. "——, I wonder how a man can live with himself when he's such a poor worm as you? However, here's your half of that last pot. I couldn't say anything worse about you than that I know you'll take it."

There was something about him which kept the others silent as he picked up the chips and threw them in Bergen's face.

"Will you cash in the rest of them, please?" he asked the banker urbanely, and the man silently totaled them and pushed the money over.

"Night, everybody," said Daly. "Take care of the baby."

He laughed gently as he went out. The big Bergen, held by a man against whom the German did not struggle much, was funny.

"He'll shoot his head off—time for me to travel," soliloquized Daly as he walked swiftly up Main Street through the quiet shadows.

He was sorry—he felt again that frustrated feeling which at times overwhelmed him. Could he ever spend a few months without that weary, losing struggle against circumstances? Every time he got aboard, some one kicked him off. Not some *one*—just a combination of circumstances. He was winning minor battles day after day and month after month, and yet seemed to be always retreating.

III

FOUR days later he alighted from the train at Tulsa, Oklahoma. Just why he had bought a ticket for Tulsa he did not know. It had simply been an impulse, and he had followed it. He inquired of a taxi driver as to hotels, and was finally driven to the hostelry which the jehu described as the best in town.

Daly had no plans, and when he took stock in his room he found that he had something over two hundred dollars in money, a good wardrobe, a trunk and a suitcase, and absolutely nothing more.

He drifted down to the bar, and treated himself to two drinks. Next to him in the well-filled, much-mirrored room was a black-haired, short man with a crippled foot which gave him a pronounced limp. The man was dressed in good-looking serge and a gray cap. His face, while somewhat hard, was rather attractive, garnished by a small black mustache and deeply tanned.

He was feeling slightly convivial, it seemed, and Daly drew him into conversation. The upshot of the matter was that Young, which was the man's name, told him that he was a comparative stranger in Tulsa himself, but that he knew of a resort on the outskirts of town which was always available for an evening's entertainment, the scope of the place including girls, gambling of all sorts, and good food. They had dinner together, and Daly accepted Young's invitation to go out to Brown's.

Before they had arrived Daly found that Young was the Texas representative of an automobile manufacturer, and that he had had an eventful career. He had been around the world as a sailor before the mast, and had crippled his leg as a race driver in a Vanderbilt Cup race a few years before. The man was a curious contrast. He cut his thick black hair in a short, stiff pompadour, and wore a cap along with excellent clothes; he was possessed of a ready wit and an unctuous chuckle and a pair of green eyes that looked as though there was a streak of meanness in him. His speech was picturesque and ungrammatical, and yet he held an important position.

At Brown's both men drifted into a stud-poker game; twenty dollar take-out and table stakes. Daly, realizing that his slender capital would brook no strains on it, played carefully. For fully three-quarters of an hour he did not even stay. Finally, on an ace in the hole and a trey up he stayed for a dollar, and at the end of the pot, when he had caught his other ace, he raked in the sum of fifty-nine dollars less the house cut, which was abstracted by the dealer.

Young played recklessly, but it was clear he knew the game and he was a little ahead. By the time the second hour had passed Daly's stack was nearly a hundred dollars, and the care of his play had earned him the reputation of a very close-fisted player. There came a pot when the big cattleman sitting directly across from him had two aces showing, in addition to a trey and a ten. The other two aces were in sight around the table, as was one trey and one ten. Daly had a pair of sixes in sight, and a ten in the hole.

"Pair of aces bets twenty dollars," boomed the cattleman.

Daly thought swiftly. He was known as a sure-thing player in the game—the man could have no more aces, and chances were against his having two pairs.

"Pair of sixes just ca—no, I'll raise you fifty," he said.

Although everybody else was out, the pot was a two-hundred-dollar one, for everybody had been in for ten dollars on the fourth card. The cattleman silently folded his cards.

"I might call anybody else," he chuckled. "But yore play and that there well-acted 'just call' stuff 've got me buffaloed."

As Daly turned his cards Young, who was sitting next him, got a look at the hole card. He nodded slightly.

At three o'clock in the morning they started back to town. Young was seventy dollars richer, Daly three hundred. And Young made his proposition.

"You say you're a stranger in this neck o' the woods and ain't got any particular plans. I know the country from Tulsa here to El Paso, and you and me might do some good hustlin' around. Want to string along with me down to San Antone and see what we can do?"

Daly accepted instantly. While there could never be any deep attachment between Young and himself, the man appealed to him on the surface, and could undoubtedly help him in his looking around.

He found that Young lived in the St. Anthony hotel—the newest and most prominent tourist hotel of the city—and that his acquaintance was wide, but mostly disreputable. The car he represented as field service man was one of the standard higher-priced machines, and by dint of a little cleverness Young was able to draw a satisfactory salary with very little effort. Nevertheless it did not take long for Daly to see that the expense of living at the hotel was far beyond Young's legitimate income, and that his finances were eked out by various methods.

The two took an apartment, and within two weeks Daly was in the full tide of San Antonio's underworld—and one of the "upper crust" thereof. The respectable half of the world is not the only part of it which has definitely separated social strata.

Daly was faced with an immediate decision: whether or not he should dip his fingers into the bankrolls of others by illegal methods. To be more explicit, whether or not he should become a crooked gambler. Without hesitation, he fell in with Young's plans.

Just what factors combined to this consummation would be hard to pick out with any accuracy. It was really foreign to his every natural impulse, and as despicable a crime as there was in the lexicon according to his training. And yet he did it, without a single twinge of conscience or a second of brooding. He was a stranger in a strange land, with little money and little earning capacity.

More powerful than this consideration, however, were the years behind him. Squalor, starvation, loneliness, want; weary months as an outcast, a shabby pariah—all generated in him a feeling that he was exhausted by his losing struggle. And the fact that those years as a poverty-stricken period seemed more harsh because every natural impulse and inborn taste of his was toward refinement and intellectuality, had its effect. He felt utterly tired and beaten, and was ripe for a revolt.

There are doubtless many people whose virtue would survive all temptation, and who would not steal a loaf of bread if they were starving, a thousand miles from home. Daly was not one of them.

Young taught him how to stack cards,

or at least gave him some ideas as to professional methods of operation. Daly, having agreed to a partnership, nevertheless vetoed a great number of Young's suggestions and worked out his own method of operation. Marked cards, cold decks, devices to hold extra cards he contemptuously brushed aside. Already Young was deferring to him, for the experienced adventurer saw in him, on a larger scale, what Brennan had—an unusual meal ticket. It would be unfair to say that Young also was very fond of him, and a little bit afraid of him, and had a great deal of respect for him.

Daly's method of cardstacking was simple, and in its simplicity lay its strength. For hours a day he practised, until he could deal five or six hands of stud and remember where each card was. He would glance over the cards which were face-up, fixing the location of the two cards which formed the highest pair. There would be two queens, say, showing, one of them the last card dealt to the first hand and the other the third or middle card of another hand.

He would pick up the hands rapidly, and unobtrusively put the two hands holding queens together on the top, remembering accurately just how many cards there were between them; in this case, there would be two intervening cards, if the first hand were laid on top of the second. In the first shuffle his sandpapered, sensitive thumbs would see to it that two more cards were shuffled between the queens, in a five-handed game. The four cards on top of the first queen would be known to him. Should there be less than the required number of cards on top, he would shuffle them on, and with half a chance would know their value.

It was arranged that Young should usually sit at his right in a game. Having shuffled the cards until he had a pair coming to himself, and knew the prospective "hole" cards of the other players, he would do a tricky double-cut which took as much skill as the average magician's trick. It looked like a very efficient cut, but really left the top ten or twelve cards right where they were. It was accomplished by cutting the bottom half off and placing it on top—with a tiny shelf between halves, formed by placing the cards a bit forward of the original top cards. Then he would cut a bunch out of the middle and put them on top, the topmost cards being the original stacked ones. There were numberless refinements, and when well done, it can not be caught.

He would offer a cut to Young, who would either refuse or do the same double-cut. Usually Daly stacked them to throw the pair to Young instead of himself. To avoid suspicion Young often sat in different places, and when this happened Daly's offer of a cut to his right-hand neighbor was made with the deck either still in his hand, or else slapped to the table quite a distance from the prospective cutter instead of right in front of him, as though inviting anybody to cut. It was surprising how often a deck which was not in easy reach of a man's hand would not be cut. Having seen the dealer cut, they would usually pass their opportunity.

Daly and Young became probably as clever a pair of cardsharps as the Southwest had known for some time. Daly worked out complicated sets of signals, which they habitually switched at least three times in an ordinary six- or eight-hour session. By these signals each of them knew precisely what the other had, at all times. They used signals, of course, in draw poker, which, generally speaking, is beyond the card-stacker's ability to beat unless resort is made to such methods as marked cards, bottom-dealing, vest-holders, and other things which the firm of Daly and Young did not dabble in.

The signals were ungettable. Voice inflections were the foundation of their system, on the same order as many vaudeville mindreaders use. The first, second, third or perhaps last word would indicate openers, two pairs, threes, or a pat hand, the letter with which the first word began indicate the value of the pair or threes, and so forth. This system was varied with other methods.

By their knowledge of each other's cards they were able to combine in building up a pot for a good hand, or together, with valueless hands, to bluff every one else out.

Daly's constant effort was to avoid overdoing things. He did not stack every hand he dealt in stud, nor did they try to be hogs in draw. They rarely suggested a game, but were always open to an invitation. For a half hour at a time they would use no signals at all, but play straight. Young was a good player, Daly a genius at it. Their combined income often touched a thousand dollars a month.

Daly was under no illusions about what

he was doing, and yet he was fairly contented. The inhibitions of lean years were broken—the apartment was tastefully and luxuriously furnished, and Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Frawley, people of color, ran it to perfection and idolized Daly. He went to New York and purchased a complete wardrobe from a tailor who acted as though he was demeaning himself in serving any customer whose pedigree and clubs were unknown to him, and spent five hundred dollars in a lump for books. Before returning to Texas he visited Louisville and told his overjoyed, half-fearful parents how well his oil investments were coming out.

His only intimacies were on the surface. He still read omnivorously, and now knew as much of what was going on in the book-publishing and theatrical circles of New York as any one could at such a distance. Magazines of all kinds; all the new novels; even theatrical weeklies and the publications of the younger radicals in international affairs came under his eager eyes. He was conscious of a vast interest in the complexity of modern life, and strove to keep abreast of the best thought of the time. He was sometimes conscious of the realization that he did not belong in the environment in which he found himself—that never in a thousand years could he find anything or anybody there to assuage the cravings within him.

He enjoyed it in its superficial aspects—there was constant excitement and change, and frequent events which aroused his keen sense of humor. The things into which he and Young dipped were at times grotesque, and all the while Daly was learning. It was at this period that the name "The Duke" was fastened on him.

He became an interesting figure in the lower strata of San Antonio society. He used words that no one had ever heard, his manners were impeccable, his clothing of the best, and he was known as "clever." And when he went on one of his rather frequent sprees there was a reckless zest and laughing devil-may-carenesss which brought him into an almost friendly relationship with many people.

They did not know that not even Young had ever come anywhere near plumbing the real Daly; that his mind was full of things as different from what he was living as day is from night. The real Daly was still without a friend; without a living soul to whom he could really talk of things which interested him.

And so he lived his inner life alone, and his outward life continued a succession of ever-shifting events, ranging from occasional nauseating debauches which invariably left him sick with self-disgust, up through gambling and into bizarre "hustling" like the matter of the funeral of Peggy Corana, for instance.

Young had lost his job by this time, and was not sorry. One day he came stumping into the apartment, threw his cap on the bed, and ruffled his thick black pompadour as he thrust a newspaper into Daly's hand.

"Read that!" he ordered. "Six drunk joy riders got killed in a automobile wreck out on the South loop, and Peggy Cortana's one of 'em."

"Well, what about it?" enquired Daly.

They both knew Peggy—a vivacious little half-caste Mexican who flitted about the streets of San Antonio.

"I dunno—I hate the idea o' her bein' buried in Potters Field and her body layin' in the morgue."

The long-nosed, breezy Young was a sentimentalist, although he would not have known exactly what that meant.

"—— if I don't think I'll give 'er a funeral, if you'll loan me some money."

He lighted a cigaret and then added characteristically:

"Might make some money out of it, at that. When that young Gerber comes down here; he and Peggy was usually pretty friendly."

Gerber was the son of a wealthy St. Louis brewer. Daly threw back his head and laughed one of his infrequent rollicking laughs that always came as a surprize to those who had merely seen him around a card table. It was full of the careless zest of youth. People invariably thought he was five years older than he was—deep lines had been etched in his face, and in the wide-set, intelligent eyes there lurked a brooding shadow that was seldom absent, except at those rare times when the indomitable spirit of recklessness shone through and he went on a laughing rampage.

They talked it over, and the upshot of the matter was that they interviewed a funeral director and had the body of the little light o' love removed from the morgue. Then Young got busy. Down the famous "line" of those days he went, and extracted a promise from every one he knew. Then to the various garages, where by dint of money and friendship he procured a large number of automobiles, ranging from stately limousines which his chauffeur friends borrowed from their employers to the disreputable Fords of some of the tire-service stations.

That, in a manner of speaking, was a funeral. The procession was three blocks long, and included probably the most amazing collection of bums and prostitutes ever gathered into a parade. Daly never forgot the convulsing sight of that procession. Young, riding with him as chief mourners, would look back and then give vent to that unctious chortle which seemed to gather weight and momentum as it proceeded from the depths of his throat.

"No wonder we didn't have no trouble gettin' a police escort," he grinned hilariously. "It's seldom every crook in town can be spotted by twelve bulls!"

The funeral cost six hundred dollars, in round numbers, and after the prodigious ceremony was over Young wrote young Mr. Gerber in St. Louis, stating that Miss Cortana had been killed and was to be buried in Potter's Field, and that he had arranged for a funeral for her and thought that inasmuch as she had been a friend of Mr. Gerber's he would be glad to know she had been buried with fitting ceremony.

A week later a check for twelve hundred dollars arrived from St. Louis, which moved the smiling Daly to remark:

"Virtue is its own reward."

A few months later came the end between Young and himself. He had been increasingly aware of the fact that he, the Duke, was the strong man of the pair. Young was going the way of wine and woman to the exclusion of all else, and his personal debt to Daly was over a thousand dollars. Not only that, but in the course of their operations it was Daly who was leader and principal money-winner. It required no Machiavelli of finance to figure that the Duke, without Young, would be a hundred times better off. Nevertheless, he rather clung to the graceless cripple, whose spirits and a certain boyishness were infectious, and out of gratitude for the fact that Young had helped him in the earlier days.

As always, though, he saw that he had always been more valuable to Young than he knew. In a sense, it was a sublimated replica of the relationship between Bushy Brennan and himself, and for the same reasons. The young, attractive Daly was not only a wonder as a partner, but also a lever through which new and wider operations were possible for Young, by reason of inherent attributes of looks and refinement which Young himself did not possess.

It was in Nueva Laredo that it happened, and it came about as quickly as a Texas thunderstorm. Daly had been thinking along those lines for some time, and knew well that Young was now his, the Duke's attaché, dependent on the younger man's leadership.

Daly had taken one of those sudden notions of his to work along the border and exercise the Spanish he had learned in college and which he had practised assiduously in San Antonio. There came occasional times when Daly's nature called for sudden action and new scenes, and this was one of them.

Having arrived at Laredo, Young recalled a certain place of more or less ill-repute which he wished to visit on the Mexican side of the river, for the purpose of renewing old acquaintance, and Daly was nothing loth. It was characteristic that now Young, without question, went on any trip which Daly proposed for himself. It seemed that the older man was frightened at the idea of losing sight of the Duke.

The place in which he found himself was a combination bar, eating place and dance-hall, with a large number of girls. He and Young adjourned upstairs, where the fat Mrs. Bellamy, American, received Young cordially. This upstairs part was more exclusive than the lower floor. It was possible for privileged customers to be served with anything they desired up there.

They sat in a long, narrow room with several tables in it. At the rear there was a small opening into a pantry, from which an aged negro who had been one of the hard-faced, loud Mrs. Bellamy's servants for a long while dispensed light nourishment.

In the course of half an hour two bronzed, middle-aged Texans and several of the girls came upstairs. The lower floor was a hum with crude music, shuffling feet, and loud laughter.

Suddenly there was the sound of heavy feet on the stairs, and a man staggered in. He was small and swarthy, although his hair was not black, but dark brown. Two guns sagged at his belt, and his evil, light eyes were reddened with liquor.

"My ——, Pablo Fitzpatrick!" breathed Mrs. Bellamy. "Hello, Davy, how's the boy?" she said aloud with great heartiness.

The little man's eyes darted around the room as he lurched to a seat.

" 'Lo, Fanny."

He called loudly for liquor, which the shambling old negro, named John, almost ran to serve. There seemed to be a curious sense of suspense in the room, as though everybody was waiting for something to happen.

"Half-breed—son of old Dave Fitzpatrick and a Mex woman. You must've heard of him—Pablo Fitzpatrick?"

The little man turned his whitish eyes in Young's direction, and Young stopped talking as though he'd been shot. He lighted a cigaret with ostentatious ease.

The Duke had heard of the evil rat before him, many times. His father, an outcast, lived at a little settlement called Tia Nita, and in the course of twenty years had made himself uncrowned king of the border. He was the chief of a band of outlaws and smugglers, and no one knew how far his tentacles reached. What they did know was that it was bad business for any man to buck Dave Fitzpatrick.

This half-breed son of his was known as a gunman. He traded on the influence of his father's name, and as often as possible fell back on his guns. He was a murderous little reptile whose advent was feared in every place on the border, albeit his guns and his father combined always to secure him the servile respect which was being shown him now.

"Bring me some sandwiches, quick!" he commanded old John.

"Yessah! What kind, sah?" quavered the white-headed old negro.

"Any kind!"

John shuffled down the room to his kitchen, and the halfbreed beckoned to one of the girls. She came, with repugnance and fear written all over her painted face, and he forced her to sit on his lap. Daly, quiet, aloof, watched. Fitzpatrick leaned over and whispered to her, and then tried to kiss her. The girl turned her head away, as though through some sudden, irresistible impulse. With a vicious oath he threw the girl to the floor and stood up.

"Where are them —— —— sandwiches?" he grated.

"Comin', sah!" called old John, his white apron visible behind the small opening through which food could be shoved when there was a waiter on duty.

"I'll speed yuh up!" blazed the breed.

The Duke had never seen anything so quick as the murderer's draw and shot. There was a choking cough from the old negro, and that little square of white apron disappeared.

One hand thrust inside his modish coat, Daly was on his feet.

"Turn around, you murdering snake!" he said coolly.

As Fitzpatrick turned, the smoking six-shooter in his hand, Daly drew and shot. There was dead silence in the little room as the badman sank to the floor, a surprised look on his face. From downstairs the sounds of revel came uninterruptedly. Then——

"My ——!" breathed Mrs. Bellamy, and the girls broke into excited chatter.

No one approached the prone Fitzpatrick. Young's flabby face was still white with fear.

"Congratulations, stranger," drawled one of the Texans. "And now yuh'd better slope. Yuh can't buck this man's daddy."

Daly knew the advice was good. He said a brief good-by to Young, knowing that he would never see him again except by accident, but camouflaging his thought successfully. All the money he had in the world—some eight hundred dollars—he had with him. He got his trunk in San Antonio, and went north. The border was not for him for some time to come.

Then it was that the Duke became a familiar character around the race tracks of the country. He had been brought up in a race-horse state, and knew and loved the ponies. He likewise knew the game. As the months passed many wise track followers watched the bets of the tall, immaculately clad young man who bet only occasionally, and then largely, and seldom lost. Finally Big Jim Carewe, half-owner and trainer of the Clover Stable, became interested in Daly and later the Duke became the Clover Stable's betting commissioner—at once the youngest and one of the closest-mouthed men on the track.

At twenty-two he was a figure of some prominence and intriguing interest in the sporting world. Through casual relationships born on the track he found his way into the world of the stage, newspapermen, artists and sporting men of New York. He fitted in naturally, and became somewhat a man of mystery to some of the more Bohemian sets in New York.

In language, manners and dress he breathed what some of his associates called "class," and to others he showed a wide knowledge of many things, from books to the doctrine of the Atonement, from poker percentages to the Freudian theories, from the life of a hobo to the career of Julius Cæsar. Some of the men he met while around the New York tracks he felt as though he would like to know better, but the exigencies of his occupation carried him over the country, and the opportunity to become anything but an interesting source of speculation to the literary and artistic world was thus dissipated. Although possessed of a large and cosmopolitan acquaintance, the real Daly was utterly alone.

He had a curious feeling that the many things he had done in those years since he had left home had left him untouched. It was as though the events of those years had merely brushed across his outer shell, molding it to a certain extent, but leaving the mental and spiritual depths within to grow as they would, and along a way entirely uninfluenced by external circumstances. Not a living soul had ever probed his mind, and he knew of no one with whom he could sit down to discuss the ideas and thoughts which were his.

Came the war; and the day the United States declared war Daly, at Tia Juana, wired his resignation and set out to join the Air Service. He finally succeeded, with the aid of his father, after weary months of mistakes at Washington, of lost papers, of repeated examinations. In those early days a candidate for the flying corps was expected to be able to hear a pin drop from Boston to New York, spot a fly with the naked eye on top of the Statue of Liberty, and be in general a combination of Hercules, Socrates, and one of the twelve apostles.

They finally condescended to accept him, and there came weary months when he went through the long-drawn out combination of slow training and pretty constant humiliation that was the lot of most flying cadets, seasoned by the driving of privates who bossed them around and made more interesting by the daily sight of cadets expelled for faults or mistakes so trivial as to be entirely meaningless and usually unavoidable.

He finally got his commission, and then raged for months because he had to instruct for weary hours every day instead of going overseas. Came a day when a cadet froze the controls, and the ship hurtled to the earth in a splintering mass. Months later Daly emerged from the hospital. He had escaped from the wreck luckily, but his prominent, high-bridged nose had been badly mashed and the doctors had been forced to reconstruct it. Those surgeons at flying fields became expert at patching up flyers whose injuries were without precedent in medical science, due to the infinite number of positions in which they crashed to the ground and the numberless different combinations of injuries to which their duties made them liable.

In Daly's case their work was comparatively simple, although at that time plastic surgery was revolutionary. His nose was now as straight as though laid out mathematically, and the result of their work, in some subtle way, had changed greatly the whole expression of his face, without anything except the nose itself being appreciably changed.

There was not so much repression and cynicism in the mouth, and the wide-set, intelligent eyes added the last touch of candor to a youthfully handsome face which gave no hint of the experienced, cynical, introspective man within. His blond hair had been darkening slightly through the years, until now it had glints of bronze through it. He looked like anything rather than the worldly-wise man who had fought his way against the world since the age of fifteen.

Out at a California field later he was approached by a stocky, rather stout man who showed the gold badge of the Secret Service. He interrogated Daly regarding the extent of his acquaintance with Ralph Bergen, who had become a draft dodger and whose case was occupying much space in the newspapers. Bergen was in hiding, and all the Bergen money was helping him.

The upshot of the conversation was that Lieutenant Robert Daly of the Air Service went on detached service, and three months later delivered the millionaire draft-dodger to the authorities. That success of his was responsible, two years later, for the order he was reading in his quarters at a Michigan field.

The order sent a little tingle down his spine, for it read that he was to proceed immediately to the border, and report to the Commanding Officer of the McMullen flight of the border patrol. It brought back to him teeming recollections of his days in Texas, and for a half hour he let his mind rove backward to the bizarre events which had filled those days.

Though much different in appearance, he was curiously unchanged in fundamentals from the repressed, aloof gambler of the past. His face had lost most of the evidences of early hardships and squalid experience and the metamorphosis worked by the surgeons had been lent the last touch by the tranquil years in the army. It was as though the tautness of his early life had been eased, and his eyes reflected the change wrought by an existence which was without financial strain or the more powerful effect of a life in which every day was a new battle.

And yet, as in his earlier days, he was conscious of being alone. There were dozens of pleasant surface intimacies, of course. But he had found no one to whom he cared to talk of the real things that interested him. Some how or other, the interests of the devil-may-care flyers were not his own. He was quietly popular, and rather baffling to his comrades. One by one they realized, and sometimes discussed, the fact that they did not know anything about him. Where his home was, whether or not his parents were living, what he had done before entering the army—his life was a blank to them. Which was an illustration of the statement that Daly, although really contented for the first time in his life, was nevertheless growing more and more resigned to going his way alone.

Some of these things he realized as he reread his orders. The thought of going back to the border was piquant and not unpleasant. The McMullen flight was the crack squadron of the patrol, which was the blue-ribbon organization of the Air Service, too. Despite himself, he was a bit proud that he was to be assigned to them. He wondered what lay behind those orders, and what the change would bring him.

He would have been delighted, although he would not have shown it, had he known that he was to have a share in certain combined activities of the border patrol and the Secret Service, and that he had been picked as a leading participant by a great but unknown man named Graves.

IV

SEVERAL days before Daly received his orders the man responsible for them was sitting in deep thought before a great flat-topped desk in Washington. The small office was buried deep in one of those massive buildings which house the centers of government, and in the late afternoon it was as quiet as a monastery.

Graves was motionless in the chair, his elbows resting on the desk and his eyes staring absently at the plain, green-tinted wall. He seemed to be a man of forty-five or so, although his thick gray hair gave him, at first glance, an older look. His face was rather long, the forehead wide and high below the smoothly brushed, crisp hair. His brown eyes were remarkably large and brilliant, shaded by heavy gray eyebrows that were now drawn together slightly in a straight, purposeful line. It was an intellectual, almost ascetic face, and while there was power in the square jaw and tight-lipped mouth, the predominant quality seemed that of the thinker rather than the man of physical accomplishment.

His eyes shifted to the heap of reports before him. He knew them almost by heart. They came from San Antonio, Dallas, Little Rock, St. Louis, Chicago, Louisville, Nashville, and other cities in or near the Mississippi valley. They included crisp descriptions, in unemotional language, of investigations which had been sometimes dangerous, sometimes romantic in their ingenuity and all maddening in their almost complete lack of success.

As a result of perusing these documents, weeks before, he had gathered a story of crime which was almost complete, and yet totally lacking in the elements needed to scotch the snake which was laying a slimy trail from the border to the Great Lakes.

He had decided then to make a personal investigation, and he had now been back in his office but a few hours after a whirlwind trip which had carried him from Texas through the middle west. And now, he reflected, he knew but little more than he had when, right here in the office, he had absorbed the combined findings of a swarm of agents who had been thrown for a loss in every effort they had made to investigate what bore all the earmarks of being a masterpiece in crime on a wholesale basis.

He got to his feet and began pacing the floor with easy, effortless strides. He was a stocky man, with powerful-looking shoulders camouflaged by the perfect tailoring of his blue suit.

It was his profile, though, far more than the power of his body, which seemed to give the lie to the impression fostered by high forehead and remarkable eyes. It seemed as though his whole countenance had changed, and become thin and hawk-like—almost cruel. The forehead revealed itself as slightly sloping, and the nose jutted forth aggressively above the drooping mouth. It was the profile of a man of action, who could follow a trail like a hound on the scent and strike without hesitation. And the combination of seemingly contradictory qualities indicated in his face were the component parts of his skill, and had made him what he was.

He walked up and down noiselessly, hands clasped behind his back and gray head bent in thought. It seemed as though his unhurried stride was the result of a smoothly-working, unexcited, methodical brain the processes of which were effortless and machine-like. He radiated concentration and smoothly-ordered efficiency; without fire, and yet without weakness.

He stopped beside his desk and picked up the telephone. He gave a number and then waited quietly for his answer. In face and attitude there was discernible resolution without the slightest tinge of nervous strain or physical tautness. It was as though he was in no hurry, and yet did not want to waste a second.

"Office of the chief of Air Service? I want to talk to General Mallory," he said evenly. His voice was low-pitched and resonant, his speech clearly precise. It was the voice of a man of education and culture.

A short wait, and then:

"Hello? Mallory? This is Graves. How about having dinner with me tonight, George — on business. And important business."

There came a few protesting words over the 'phone, which Graves interrupted.

"I said important business," he said calmly, as though that must inevitably settle matters. "Can't you break it?"

That was all General Mallory needed, apparently. He could and did break the engagement, and at six-thirty was ensconced before a tiny open fire in the diminutive sitting-room of Graves' bachelor apartment.

For a while the two men sat in desultory conversation, waiting for the Filipino boy to finish mixing civilized drinks from Graves' pre-war stock. Graves was leaning back comfortably in his chair, knees crossed, smoking a pipe. Without any perceptible physical change in him, he nevertheless seemed to have completely dismissed everything baffling from his mind. He seemed to have relaxed, although it would have been impossible to have placed a finger on any single thing which would indicate a change, unless it was the eyes, which now held no trace of absent-mindedness.

In both men's minds were recollections of the first time they had met, months before. The instant liking and mutual respect generated then had now grown into the friendship of two strong men than which there is nothing deeper.

It was while the cream of the American Air Service, under General Mallory, were down at Langham Field, in Virginia, gathered there to prove to the wide world what skilled airmen with good ships could do to the most modern of navies if cut loose with some bombs. That idea, and the final execution of it, had been the result of the genius of the idolized leader of the youngest branch of the Service, and the revolutionary success of the project had been due to the same thing plus the skill of the youthful veterans of the air who had flown eighty miles out to sea in land ships and sunk their massive targets.

Graves had come to Langham Field, armed with letters from two men of unequivocal power in the government, and laid before General Mallory a plan whereby he, Graves, with the assistance of an airplane and two able flyers, intended to invade the mountain retreat of a desperate band of train-robbers and practically kidnap the chief under the nose of his followers. With the aid of Jim Broughton and Larry Hinkley, two soldiers of fortune who had finally landed, like so many of their kind, in the Air Service, the project had been carried out.

That first day, Graves reflected, the friendship between the two men had started, until now they could sit there before the fire in the silence of utter understanding.

The boy served the drinks, and withdrew.

"Well, what's on your mind, old boy?" inquired the forty-five-year-old general who was one of the world's authorities on its newest science. "Whenever you fellows, and you especially, get to talking important business I'm waiting with my ears pushed out."

"First of all, some questions," returned Graves crisply.

His previous air of nonchalant ease, almost laziness, fell away with those words, and the general felt again the persistent, unshakable drive of the man when he was attaining an object.

"Shoot!" said the general briefly.

"Just what is this border patrol of yours—their duties, I mean?"

"It's a bunch of a little over a hundred of our veteran flyers, who patrol the border by air twice a day from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of California. Their duties in general are to watch the border for lawlessness of any kind, and there is an international flavor, if you get what I mean."

Graves nodded.

"The problem of the border," he remarked, lighting a cigar with deft movements of his slim-fingered, well-kept hands.

"I may say that in various matters with which the government has charged the patrol—things that must always, probably, be kept as secret as the grave, that gang of mine have never been bested. Graves, there's not only one of the most romantic body of government servants in the world, I believe, but one of the most valuable as well."

"I've gathered something of the kind from your frequent enthusiastic remarks about them," granted Graves. "But the usual run of their duties are rather more obvious and above-board than secret, are they not? That is, they aren't used in any sense as a border secret service, for instance; they're more like the eyes of the government, gathering information which other agencies investigate and work on."

"Broadly speaking, yes."

"All right. Now we have in the files of the Department the story of how Lieutenant MacDowell of the patrol, almost single-handed, got the goods on Fitzpatrick, down there, and ended up by lodging the most powerful and able criminal on the border in jail. Am I right?"

"You most certainly are. Tex MacDowell——"

"Let me see if I've got the outlines correctly. Fitzpatrick was boss of the border, and smuggled guns to the Mexicans and hooch and drugs over here for years by means of a powerful and corrupt organization which included everybody from our own customs officials—some of them—to regular-style border gunmen. MacDowell finally got Fitzpatrick, and also uncovered the fact that the town of Ausman on the Gulf was distributing point for some of Fitzpatrick's largest consignments of contraband. MacDowell, in other words, did one of the best pieces of work along that line that I ever remember. Of course I understand that it came about only partially through the regular duties of the patrol, but the point is that MacDowell sized up the situation and handled it wonderfully."

"Exactly. He first got tied up with Fitzpatrick on a personal grudge affair handed down from his ranchman-father, an old enemy of Fitzpatrick's."

"Is MacDowell still on the border?"

"Yes—McMullen, the eastern station of the patrol. South of San Antonio."

"There's another man—Lieutenant Daly—who did a nice piece of work in rounding up that millionaire draft-dodger Bergen. Is he still in the service?"

General Mallory stirred his drink meditatively. By reason of small appropriations and the casualties of the service, his active flyers numbered only a few hundred, and he could usually spot any one of them with a moment's thought.

"Daly—Daly," he mused. "What sort of a looking fellow——"

"I saw him once. Tall, slim, blond, handsome as ——"

"I've got you. Rather a queer chap. Robert Daly. He's at Selfridge Field, Michigan, now, I believe. Anyway, he's still in the service."

"Good. Now, George, without letting your enthusiasm get the best of you, tell me this: if it should be necessary for me to enlist the aid of some members of the border patrol on some—important work—work which would require absolute secrecy on the part of the whole bunch and maybe some delicate and nervy work on the part of a few picked men, could I count on that bunch of sky-running cowboys of yours?"

"Absolutely!" stated Mallory. "Now, what's the lay?"

"There has apparently arisen another Fitzpatrick," stated Graves incisively. "Anyway, there is a flood of drugs of every description inundating this country. The trail is plain from the border right through to Chicago, with off-shoots to Louisville, Memphis, Omaha, Chattanooga, and a bunch of other cities. The main line runs due north from San Antonio. There never has been anything like it. A couple of years ago, when Dave Fitzpatrick was working, he fooled us until MacDowell stumbled in and got him, but even he did not do business on this scale.

"Just a few months ago there was a temporary flurry in San Antonio, which was stopped by jacking up the sheriffs and rangers along the border and searching railroad trains, and so forth. Now it's started again, on a scale so huge that it's unbelievable. Millions of dollars a month, Mallory. And the continuous work of our best agents has failed to stop it, or even dent it. There have been one or two poor unfortunates rounded up who told where they got the stuff, but when the agents go there and search nothing is found. Even if we did get one or two dealers, I am convinced it would do no good—it'd be like gunning for an octopus and knocking off the tip of one tentacle. And yet it is certain that thousands upon thousands of drug addicts all through the country are supplied on a scale heretofore unknown. We haven't got anywhere on that end of the matter.

"The thing to do is stop it at the source, and that source I am convinced is the Mexican border. Bound to be. It's easy to get the stuff over, but how they deliver it is a mystery. I tell you the organization of the thing is uncanny. The department isn't usually up a tree as far as this.

"What I've got to do is get the thing right down there where the mischief starts—no sense of messing around the outskirts."

"I see," nodded Mallory. "Just how——"

"I am also convinced that the head or heads of this organization are not only not amateurs, but are unusual in every way. In other words, no common crooks. And from all indications, the regular agencies of the Government, as well as some that are not so regular or well known, are spotted. Another point: that border is thousands of miles long. The regular agencies have already fallen down, even your patrol, although of course they are not to blame because they can't fly at night and their duties along those lines are not definite. But I want to enlist, definitely, the whole patrol on the spotting of this gang, and also some individual members as regular agents, practically speaking, under my direction.

"I can't do a great deal, personally, because, despite the fact that there has always been every precaution taken to attain secrecy in my operations, I am known a bit to some of the—er—larger fry in the criminal world. It is my idea that if I can get the aid of some of your devil-may-care young men who have already proved their worth in similar situations I can use them as scouts and investigators, with the whole force of the border patrol and all other agencies along the border in back of them, ready to jump when the word goes out. It's big, Mallory."

"Sounds so. It's your idea that some of my men like Tex MacDowell and Daly could dig out the dope with less difficulty than any regular agent because of the fact that they're young army officers who would not be suspected of just that kind of work without definite cause?"

"Exactly. And with the whole patrol primed on the deal, as well as other trustworthy agents—we must watch out for bribery—I think we can get somewhere. If the entire law-enforcement bunch on that forsaken Rio Grande gets working together on the thing we can get this bunch. I want a couple of aces to do some of the inside work. For that reason I want Daly ordered to the border and some official papers given to me which will make me temporarily the man-in-charge of your bunch."

"Any particular place you want Daly to go?"

"McMullen will be all right. I am of the opinion that the eastern stretch of the border will be found to be the location of the thing, being nearer to San Antonio, where the trail first starts. Mallory, we've watched that town like a hawk, and haven't the least idea how the stuff gets there. And I am of the opinion that all the millions of dollars' worth of contraband that is distributed in the northern cities must go through there, too."

"Dinner, sar!" grinned the Filipino boy from the dining-room door, and the two men who were each supreme servants of their country along different lines cut their discussion short.

It was resumed after the meal, and when the vigorous young general left at midnight every possible detail of the share his prize outfit was to have in the undertaking was firmly in his mind. Graves' machine-like brain left little to chance—with a precision that was almost uncanny, point after point and detail after detail was settled without effort or delay. There was something inevitable about Graves on a trail.

V

IT WAS five days after Graves and General Mallory started the machinery of Washington into motion that matters got under way at McMullen, although no one there had a hint of their meaning.

The day's work was done, and in the recreation room of the McMullen flight the dozen khaki-clad young men who composed the flying personnel of the most famous squadron of the patrol were lounging around, waiting for the Chink to ring the dinner bell. The Oriental factotum always pounded the bell as though he had a personal grudge against it, so that he could quarrel with any one who was late.

Outside, the tiny airdrome was dim under thickening shadows, and the lights at hangar-corners outlined the east and west limits of the field. The row of barracks and buildings housing headquarters, messhall and recreation building were ablaze with light. The room in which it was the invariable custom of the flyers to gather preparatory to dinner was large and cheery, heated now by a blazing fire in the fireplace. A huge table held many magazines, and a piano, phonograph, and easy chairs were adjuncts to walls covered with various decorations, ranging from nude young women to splintered propellers which were souvenirs of some of the more exciting wrecks of members of the squadron.

The phonograph was going full blast, and Major Searles, flight surgeon, was indulging in his favorite recreation—humming a discordant tuba accompaniment to the tune. The Major had never forgotten that he had once been a star performer on the tuba in a high school band.

"So we have another addition due us," Captain Kennard, the stocky little Commanding Officer, was remarking. "Looking back over the bozos who've blown into this outfit, from Tex MacDowell here on down——"

"Or up," interrupted little Pete Miller with sarcastic intent.

"—I fail to remember a one that hasn't resulted in battle, murder and sudden death of some kind."

George Hickman, a huge blond observer, grinned as he threw a magazine on the table.

"Usually has meant something doing. They're either freaks like Tex or crooks like Atkins or——"

"I don't mind being insulted by a man that ranks me," drawled Tex MacDowell, who was sprawled in a chair before the fireplace. "But when a runt like Pete and a bovine dumbbell like you, George, start insinuating it's against reason."

"What's the new man's name—anybody know him?" inquired Pop Cravath, who, being thirty and bald, was looked upon as the Methusalah of the outfit.

"Name's Daly."

"Not Robert Daly?" asked Sleepy Spears, who was draped on a bench in his customary attitude of complete repose.

"Exactly. Know him?"

"I was at May Field in California with him for three months, but as near as I can find out there didn't anybody know him. Queer egg—stayed by himself a good deal. Handsome as a movie idol minus the cow eyes and Marcel wave, could fly like ——, and didn't seem to give a —— what anybody else did or thought as long as they left him alone."

"Man of mystery stuff—very thrilling," put in Miller. "What?"

"If that isn't the asthmatic moan of Sheriff Trowbridge's flivver I'm in the Infantry," interrupted Jimmy Jennings, a slim, good-looking youngster who was an ace on the official records.

There was a loud backfire from without.

"That's him," chuckled Tex.

"Ahoy there!" boomed a deep voice, and the door was suddenly opened.

Sheriff Bill Trowbridge ducked his sombreroed head to avoid knocking off his prodigious headgear, and sidled in sideways to keep his huge body from scraping the sides of the door.

"Hello, hellions," he greeted them.

The bronzed young flyers chorused a welcome, for the old sheriff was a friend and ally of long standing. In his customary costume of flannel shirt, vest, tent-like Stetson and overalls tucked in loose boots he was a picturesque survival of the olden days when he and his sidekick, now the Honorable Samuel Edwards, Mayor of McMullen, had ranged the southwest as cowboys and, later, star members of the Texas Rangers. His haberdashery was now garnished with the two long-barreled, pearl-handled six shooters which were famous from Nogales to Brownsville. That indicated that he either had been or was on business bent.

He dwarfed even Tex MacDowell, who was six feet two, and he must have weighed two hundred and fifty pounds without an extra ounce of fat. He put his sombrero on the table, and ran his fingers through his disordered shock of gray hair.

"No rest for the weary," he rumbled, taking out the makings. "Off and on for months they been runnin' me ragged on this smugglin', and now, just after gettin' back from roundin' up that *hombre* that shot Sim Wethers I git word that I got to be in San Antone tomorruh night. Cap'n, that means you got tuh let me have a ship an' a pilot——"

There was a chorus of chuckles. The sheriff inserted his toy-like brown-paper cigaret beneath his bushy mustache while his twinkling eyes, the centers of networks of wrinkles, ranged the room.

"Laugh, yuh onregenerate devils," he chuckled finally.

Captain Kennard fixed the old man with a keen and glittering eye.

"Ever since the first time when you, prostituting the perquisites of your high office, inveigled and persuaded me into letting you have a ride under the regulation which says that famous persons may be given aerial transportation, you have nefariously used every excuse to force me to pander to your depraved taste for the air," he said impressively.

"You must o' been perusin' the encyclopedia fur light readin'," boomed Trowbridge. "I ain't been exposed to such a cloudburst o' language since—"

"I firmly believe you have allowed criminals to escape your clutches for the pure purpose of chasing them by 'plane," went on Captain Kennard solemnly.

The weather-beaten old man did not deny the general allegation contained in the captain's remarks. His love of flying was a standing joke to the airmen, and in many cases it had brought far-reaching results. With Tex MacDowell and Sleepy Spears as pilots, no less than three important criminals had been bagged from the air, so to speak, by the sheriff.

"No, I'll tell yuh," said Trowbridge, seriously. "I been down Caralia way roundin' up that Spig that shot Wethers, as I told yuh, and just got back. There was a wire from a source that don't take no back talk tellin' me, to report to San Antone if possible on somethin'—important—bigger'n the county, if yuh get me. An' I want tuh be there, and the train left at four o'clock this afternoon, as you may be aware of even though travelin' by aerial routes mostly."

"Sounds as mysterious as Sleepy talking about our coming flyer, Daly," remarked Tex. "This atmosphere of conspiracy and dark secrecy is getting on my healthy nerves and is abhorrent to my open-and-aboveboard spirit."

"Well, I suppose, Tex, that you'll have to take this superannuated minion of the law up to San Antone tomorrow," laughed Captain Kennard.

The earth-shaking clamor born of the big bell and the Chink's strong right arm made further conversation momentarily impossible.

"How about chow?" asked the C. O. as the din died away.

"Shore. I been waitin' for an invitation."

They trooped over to the mess hall, where the meal was eaten to the accompaniment of considerable facetiousness, as well as casual conversation on matters of a sort that would have held a New York dinner table spell-bound with interest. Swift tragedies of the border were discussed briefly, as well as recent happenings in the day's work having to do with such widely diverse things as the nabbing of Wethers' murderer to the recent wanderings of a border flyer in the mountains for three days without food or water after landing in a cañon.

The sheriff was in his element. For two years he had been a close intimate of the flight which had been stationed near the thriving town of McMullen, and he was a never-failing friend of the young airmen in whom he saw reincarnations of those who had ridden with him through that same country in the long-vanished days of his youth.

The meal over, the squadron split into three sections—bridge, poker and the townward contingent. The sheriff took a hand in the poker game, which included Tex MacDowell, Hichman, Binder, Carson and Jennings. As usual, Tex and the sheriff between them cleaned up most of the profits. The flyer who was in Paradise when he had a contest of any kind on his hands, was in his element in a poker game.

That restless spirit of his—the joy in pitting himself against others and battling against odds—seemed to find an outlet in gambling. His meteoric border career, a combination of reckless flying feats and battles with the powerful outlaws who were bent on his destruction had been due in considerable measure to the ineradicable love for a struggle of any kind whatsoever which he had inherited from his famous ranchman-father, known the length and breadth of Texas as "Roaring Bill" MacDowell. Time after time, in that months-long struggle with the powerful Dave Fitzpatrick, he had deliberately walked into traps set for him by the old outlaw, and by this means had finally succeeded in overthrowing the man who for years had held the lawless elements of the border in his grip.

At the end of the game he arranged with the sheriff for a reasonably early start in the morning, and walked slowly to his tent, one of a long line which composed the living quarters of the flight. He was curiously restless. The last few months had been uneventful, comparatively speaking, and every once in so often there came over him a sense of dissatisfaction.

All his life he had sought excitement, and the chase had led him through strange wanderings, interspersed with four years at an eastern university and four years with the Royal Air Force in France, where he had collected several Hun planes and a variety of decorations. Then had come the border patrol, and joyous months when the enmity of Dave Fitzpatrick had charged life with eventful contentment. In those months he had become famous, but that meant nothing to him. It was the satisfaction of the struggle itself which had satisfied him.

He fell asleep finally, hoping vaguely that something would turn up soon. Life was growing monotonous.

VI

SO WHEN there was no particular stimulus to energetic effort Tex always gave free reign to his naturally languorous ideas, so he slept late that morning. After a leisurely breakfast he went through the hangars—he was engineering officer of the flight, which included the duties of test pilot—and inspected shops and ships.

His force of mechanics, under the supervision of Sergeant Cary, were hard at work. One great De Haviland was standing in a corner while swarming men were engaged in pulling the worn-out Liberty motor and installing a new one. Other ships were being rerigged, and in the shop three experts were engaged in repairing carbureters and installing a new cylinder in a motor.

Having given orders that his ship was to be ready to go at ten o'clock, MacDowell went over to the office to sign reports and look over the mail. When he had finished the two morning patrol ships, one from the eastward beat to the Gulf and the other from the westward route toward Laredo, had both returned, and the two oil-grimed pilots and their observers had turned in their reports.

As the tall young Texan emerged into the flooding sunlight which bathed the level, sandy aerodrome he saw Sergeant Cary in the cockpit of his ship, and two mechanics spinning the propeller.

"Contact!" one of them yelled, and at Cary's answering call they set themselves in tandem formation, and with swaying bodies pulled the propeller through, the anchor man jerking the other out of the way on the end of the swing. The Liberty caught, and idled along sweetly.

A big limousine belonging to the Honorable Samuel Edwards swung into the aerodrome and purred down the line of corrugated iron hangars, bearing, in addition to the owner, the sheriff. Trowbridge was now arrayed in a blue suit, with soft white shirt and loosely tied black bow tie. On his leonine head was a decent black sombrero.

"Be careful of him," admonished the rotund and genial mayor. "He's in his second childhood."

MacDowell's generous mouth widened.

"You old-timers don't ever figure a pilot would be careful of his own neck, and thus automatically safeguard the passenger from all harm, do you?" he inquired.

"Will wonders never cease," rumbled Trowbridge, his puckered eyes twinkling. "Tex MacDowell oratin' about bein' careful o' his own neck!"

The four hundred and fifty horse-power Liberty was now running along half-open on the warm-up, and conversation became difficult. Mechanics stationed themselves on the wing-tips, and another took his position on the tail while the flailing propeller pulled the ship tight against the wheel blocks. Tex gave the sheriff's bag to a mechanic to wire on the ship, and departed for his own grip, helmets and goggles, a flying suit for the sheriff, and emergency rations.

When he returned the motor was still, and the crew were wiring the baggage on the two lower wings, snug up against the fuselage. Tex put on helmet, leather coat and gauntlets, although the air seemed almost too warm for the heavy clothing, and then helped the sheriff into furlined flying coveralls. When Trowbridge was finally arrayed for the air he would have dwarfed a grizzly bear. Both men had their guns strapped on—guns and emergency rations were necessities, often.

Sergeant Cary strapped the sheriff in the back-seat while Tex opened the gas petcocks to the main tank, pumped up the air pressure to three pounds, and made sure both switches were cut.

"Off!" he yelled, and the mechanics spun the prop. At "Contact!" Tex snapped on one switch, and with the spark lever at full retard and his hands on throttle and stick waited, alert to catch the motor when they pulled the propeller through. In a second the heavy six-foot stick moved suddenly as the men pulled through, and a quick stab at the throttle caught it. It whirled gently, and the needles on the crowded instrument board before him sprang into quivering life. The tachometer indicator showed five hundred revolutions a minute, the oil gage sprang to fifteen pounds pressure, the voltmeter was discharging. The pilot clicked on the other switch of the double-ignition system. The centigrade thermometer crept up to 70.

Slowly the throttle went forward as MacDowell's eyes swept the board, reading the complicated mass with effortless ease, striving to detect any weakness. He listened for the slightest miss in the motor, and could detect none. Finally the Liberty was roaring along wide open, and it seemed as though the din filled the universe. Seventeen hundred revolutions a minute—the propeller was now invisible, and the gages jumped; oil to thirty pounds, air to three, voltmeter to a charge of three points, the thermometer crept to eighty. The ton-and-a-half ship trembled like a live thing straining to be gone, and from behind it great swirling billows of dust rose heavily in the air, hiding the mechanic who actually leaned against the terrific airblast of the propeller.

Slowly the roar died away to the even, whispering drum of idling speed, and Tex looked around at the sheriff, who nodded. The veteran's eyes were sparkling like a boy's behind the big goggles.

Tex nodded to the mechanics, who pulled the wheel blocks and helped turn the ship as the pilot fed it the throttle and applied full rudder. With motor a third of the way open the ship trundled rapidly up the line of hangars, turning as it approached the fence which formed the northern boundary of the airdrome. Then the motor went full on, and Tex pressed forward on the stick until the tail-skid left the ground and the mighty plane hurled itself across the field like a roaring behemoth rushing for its prey. Eighty miles an hour, and a slight pull on the stick brought it into the air. A few seconds to gather excess speed, and with a smooth combination of right rudder and stick the DeHaviland arched upward in a clean climbing turn.

Tex circled the airdrome twice, getting altitude and watching the sensitive instruments which told to his practised eyes the story of the motor. He throttled to fifteen hundred revs a minute, adjusted the motor shutters to keep the temperature at an even eighty degrees, and then banked around until the floating compass read north. He settled down well behind the windshield for the long two hundred and fifty mile grind to San Antonio.

There being no particular hurry, he decided to follow the railroad rather than take the straight airline across the boundless mesquite. There were occasional fields along the railroad track, while on the shorter airline there were practically none for over a hundred miles. MacDowell's reputation as an airman had been built on a variety of flying achievements, but his philosophy included this basic premise: reckless flying which depends on Providence is foolish; reckless flying in which the flyer depends on his own skill is perfectly all right if a man has confidence enough in his own ability.

Should he take the airline and the motor quit, no possible skill of his could save them from crashing into the mesquite at seventy miles an hour. Therefore, taking that route when it was not necessary meant simply staking life against the motor. He would do a vertical bank ten feet above the ground because he knew he could accomplish it—could even straighten and land if the motor failed. But deliberately putting himself in a position where his own matchless skill could not help him was the dumbest thing in the world, to his mind.

For a few moments the thin steel path below, growing smaller as the DeHaviland climbed upward, led through open fields. Houses grew toy-like, and roads were white ribbons. Great fields were like dun handkerchiefs spread on the ground to dry, occasional animals tiny insects. Then there came into view a vast vista of rolling, gray-green mesquite, stretching as far as the eye could see ahead and to either side. The rails plunged into that slumbering, desolation, the path of them like a curving scar on a flat canvas.

They were five thousand feet high now, Tex having decided to fly at that altitude so he would have every opportunity to reach one of the small clearings which occasionally appeared along the railroad track in the event of trouble. The rim of the mesquite slipped behind, and at a hundred miles an hour they roared along over a far-stretching waste, occasionally banking around fleecy mountains of snow-white mist as stately cumulous clouds disputed their passage. For over an hour the earth was barren of any life, apparently; occasional small stations on the railroad, and isolated ranch-houses at wide intervals.

An hour and three-quarters after leaving McMullen the end of the mesquite came in sight—there was a band of darker green ahead. Tex, despite long experience, heaved a sigh of relief as they finally hurtled across the boundary of the desert and came above more open country. The Liberty had drummed along with unbreaking rhythm for that hundred and seventy-five miles, and never for an instant had it faltered, but it was nevertheless pleasant to know that possible landing fields lay below if it should fail. Tex throttled to thirteen hundred revolutions, and went into a slight dive to three thousand feet, where the air became suddenly warm. It was as though they had plunged into a warm bath.

Two other railroads came in sight, converging toward San Antonio, and new roads sprang into being. Houses were more frequent, although largely isolated, until finally they thickened into tiny settlements which on the ground were fairly sizeable villages.

San Antonio was a huge smudge on the horizon when Tex, leaning over the side of the ship for a casual look at the ground, saw something that interested him. A big touring car, traveling slowly along a deserted stretch of the Rio Road, had been passed by a smaller car. Some distance ahead the smaller car stopped, and four men piled out, like ants out of a tiny black heap. The larger car stopped, and six or seven people got out slowly.

Tex, fighting the terrific air blast fashioned of their rushing speed and the propellor wash, held his goggles from blowing around and peered down. In the back seat the sheriff was doing the same. Suddenly the pilot's gray eyes glowed behind his goggles and he turned toward the sheriff. The old man's puckered eyes were flashing fire, and beneath the flowing, wind-swept mustache his mouth was smiling grimly. With one puffy-looking arm he motioned downward.

Both had seen the same thing—the passengers in that big car had their hands in the air, and the four men had guns.

Tex shoved forward on the stick, and the DeHaviland shot toward the earth like a comet. The air speedometer read a hundred and sixty miles an hour, and the wires were screaming their protest and the ship trembling like a leaf. Tex throttled, pulled up for a moment to kill some of the speed, which might break the frail wings, and then sent it roaring on its way again in a steep spiral.

With rudder and stick and motor Tex did all he knew to get to the ground as speedily as he could, and he by no means lived up to the tenets of conservative flying in DeHavilands. At intervals, as they swept earthward like a great prehistoric bird, he watched that dramatic scene being played out fifteen hundred feet below. It was robbery, pure and simple. The victims could be seen handing over things, one by one.

Apparently the robbers were paying no attention to the ship. At five hundred feet Tex knew that they were so absolutely sure that the ship above had no particular significance to them that they were not even hurrying. The airman's eyes swept the horizon, and he could not see a sign of any approaching vehicle on the Rio Road.

The Texan's eyes were like glowing coals, lighted by a reckless delight. He did not know precisely what he was going to do—there were two fields close by the wide road, but landing would do no good. Undoubtedly the robbers had put at least one tire out of commission on the big car.

Suddenly a thought struck him. He turned to the excited sheriff, and motioned with his hands. Whether or not Trowbridge caught his idea he did not know, but he did know that the staunch old war horse could be counted on to the last ditch.

With dancing eyes Tex banked around a few hundred yards back of the tableau, and in a moment was rushing along above the road, barely ten feet high. The robbers were watching now, having stopped halfway to their car, which was a Ford. Tex handled the monster of linen and wood and steel beneath him, keeping it straight down the road. As it flashed across the astounded group gathered around the big car the pilot, head out-thrust from the cockpit to see better, swerved slightly to the left and dipped.

It was accurate shooting. The next second the right wing-tip had slashed through the Ford and sent it hurtling into the ditch, a broken mass of metal. The DeHaviland swerved to the right in a slight skid, and the wing tip wobbled dangerously. For ten seconds it was touch and go. The wounded wing made the ship so wing-heavy on that side, due to lost air surface, that the pilot had to fight desperately to keep it from smashing to the ground. The DeHaviland wobbled across a fence, and in a slight side-slip which Tex could not prevent came to earth in a small field, landing on the right wheel. It bounced, and MacDowell jammed the stick forward and clear to the left. It hit again, on both wheels this time, and finally stopped rolling a few yards from the other boundary fence.

Trowbridge was out of the rear cockpit almost before motion ceased. Tex, snapping off the switches, was not five seconds behind him.

As he hit the ground he saw the highwaymen piling into the big car, and as he and the sheriff made for the road they started. It was plain that at least one tire was through for a while, but the crooks used it just the same.

Guns in their hands, the airman and the sheriff ran for the road to cut them off. The ship had come to earth a hundred yards to one side of the road, and twice as far ahead of the cars. The highwaymen had not attempted to turn the car around, but had started it in the direction it was headed.

Tex, running with an effortless long-legged stride, outstripped the sheriff at every bound. Bullets whistled past him as the thieves shot from the jouncing car. Tex returned the fire, and had the satisfaction of hearing a yelp of pain.

He was less than fifty yards from the car as it drew abreast of him. The sheriff was twenty-five yards farther back. With increased speed the big touring car swayed down the pike. The flyer stopped, and turned toward the sheriff, realizing the hopelessness of the chase.

Not so Bill Trowbridge, sheriff of Hidalgo county. The big six-shooter was speaking as the old man threw down on his prey, and in six shoots he had ruined both rear tires, and the car barely escaped going in the ditch.

"At-a-boy, sheriff!" shouted the grinning flyer, and sped toward the ruined car, which was now spewing forth its occupants.

"Git in the ditch, Tex!" came the sheriff's panting roar as he lumbered forward.

A shot whiffed by MacDowell's face so closely that he could feel the wind of it. In a few leaps he had reached the ditch and was crouching in the shallow depression, fifty yards from the car. In a few seconds the sheriff joined him.

It was a brief and unequal battle. The sheriff could, and frequently had, stood at the pulling lever of a trap range and drawn and shattered a clay pigeon with one of those six-shooters, and Tex had been born and raised on the Circle Eight ranch. The crooks were not effective with a revolver at fifty yards.

They took shelter behind the car, poking cautious heads around it to shoot. The first man that did this poked his head right into the grave, for the sweating Trowbridge drilled him cleanly. The two unhurt men and the one Tex had winged on the fly leaped into the ditch on the opposite side of the road, and in the process Tex and the sheriff, their guns speaking together, dropped another man.

"About ready to call it a day?" bellowed the sheriff as he and Tex made their cautious way down the ditch.

For a moment there was no answer. Then:

"Don't shoot! We're givin' up!" came a hail, and one cautious head, crowned with a derby hat, poked up above the level of the other ditch.

"Understand?" he yelled.

"Yeah. Throw yore guns—all of 'em—out in the road," commanded Trowbridge.

The one unhurt member of the quartette threw a small revolver in the road, and reached down in the ditch for another. Then he assisted the man Tex had bored in the arm to get to the road. The sheriff's first victim was lying motionless beside the car, the fourth man sprawled half in the ditch and half on the road.

Tex, followed by the sheriff, approached the two men cautiously.

"Get 'em up!" he commanded, and three hands were in the air.

"This is a fine how-do-you-do," remarked the Texan, his gray eyes still with the remnants of unholy fire in them. "Sheriff, I'll take a look at these other hombres."

The man beside the car was utterly and irretrievably deceased.

"Gone to his eternal roast," remarked Tex.

He made a brief examination of the other fellow.

"Through the shoulder, pretty far down," he said, and reached for his handkerchief.

"Won't do——"

"Anything we can do?" asked a breathless voice, and the kneeling flyer glanced upward to meet the excited gaze of a tall and exceptionally handsome man, arrayed in the most immaculate of clothing. Surrounding the sheriff were two men and a girl, and two other young women, bobbed haired and white-faced, joined the first arrival with Tex.

"I need a bandage for this fellow," drawled the Texan. "Do either of you charming damsels possess a petticoat or anything which you could dispense with for charity?"

The two young women, still pale and unstrung, laughed shakily.

"Neither of us——"

"Wait a minute!" commanded the vivacious one with the red hair.

She disappeared behind the car.

"By —— this has been an experience!" breathed the man, wiping his face with his handkerchief. "'By George, it was wonderful the way you fellows ripped 'em up by land and air, so to speak. Is the other chap dead?"

"He won't ever be any deader," returned Tex. "Ah, here we come. Thanks, little lady. I don't know quite what this is, but it'll do to perfection, if you'll lend me your handkerchief too," he added to the man, who promptly handed it over.

With the aid of the brassière and the two handkerchiefs Tex staunched the generously bleeding wound, and then picked up the now unconscious man and laid him on the back seat of the automobile.

"One of 'em dead, eh?" came the sheriff's booming voice. "Thought I plugged that hombre clean. Get in the front, you two Diamond Dicks, where I can keep my eye on yuh easy-like."

The two crestfallen crooks, their dark clothes dirty and disheveled, obeyed with downcast looks. They were small, hard-faced men, a type of gunman bred by city slums. The dead man was larger, with brick-red hair and a broken nose.

"That feller's Red Graney—caught him down to McMullen once when he was wanted for stickin' up somebody one night in Alamo Plaza," remarked Trowbridge.

The three men and three women who had composed the occupants of the big car were still in the process of recovering from the fast-moving events of the last five minutes, and could apparently find no words for the moment. They looked at the two men who had swooped from the sky so miraculously as though they were beings of a different world.

"Sheriff, I'll get to a telephone and get an auto repair outfit, some cops, and a truck from Donovan Field out here to salvage the débris," said Tex, rolling himself a cigaret with the ease of long practise.

He got to his feet and surveyed the scene with his wide mouth in a whimsical quirk.

"Everything busted, from the bold bad robbers to one DeHaviland airplane, O. D. As I remember it, there was a house about half a mile away through that grove."

He turned to the red-headed girl who had supplied the bandage.

"Shall I include an order from some lingerie shop?" he asked, the corners of his mouth twitching slightly.

"I guess I can wait," she returned, sudden mirth in her eyes.

Tex stripped off his leather coat, helmet and goggles, and laid them on the running board.

"So saying, he departed for succor," he remarked, and started across the fields toward the house he had in mind. It was out of sight, but he had a fairly good idea of the location.

"You fellows are sure fast workers," remarked one of the men.

He was the only one in the party of middle age—a stout, fleshy-faced man with small brown eyes, a rather sensual mouth and the general look of a man who had lived well about him. He wore a soft hat, and from head to feet was dressed with quiet richness.

"I presume you want yore pretties back," remarked the sheriff. "Hand things over, you two!" he commanded.

The loot was very considerable. There were several rings and brooches, and one large diamond belonging to the big man, as well as over a thousand dollars in money.

After the belongings had been returned to their proper owners one of the men, a slender, keen-faced young fellow with glossy black hair and regular features put out his hand to the towering old sheriff.

"Of course we're more grateful than we can tell you, sir," he said with an attractive smile. "It was the wildest thing that ever happened in my life, and I'll never forget the way you fellows handled it. My name is Beckman."

"Trowbridge. Glad to know you. And fur the gratitude, don't mention it. I enjoyed myself, and speakin' fur Tex MacDowell, that long-legged young rascal now disappearin' across the fields, he'd have flew for days just on the chance o' this much fun."

"This is Joe Bernan here—Sheriff Trowbridge."

The sheriff shooks hands with the strikingly handsome man who had first come up to MacDowell, and then met the girls. The red-headed girl was Merle Hopper, the sparkling black-haired damsel proved to be Miss Jessica White, and an equally attractive blonde was Elsie West. The older man was Mr. George D. Crane.

"Live in San Antone?" queried the sheriff. "How did all this here iniquity come about?"

"No, all of us but Mr. Crane here are actors," responded Beckman. "We're supposed to be on the bill at the Majestic this week, but they've closed the theater on account of the flu epidemic. I guess these crooks must have spotted us and been waiting their chance."

"Shouldn't be surprised. Pretty tidy haul they'd o' had," chuckled the sheriff. "The stage must be a payin' profession. So you-all are actors, eh? This kind o' stuff's kind o' new to yuh, then, I presume."

"Right you are!" grinned Bernan.

The girls were chattering excitedly, sitting close together on the running board of the car. The sheriff removed the heavy flying suit, explaining meanwhile how he and Tex had happened along.

"So you come from the border, eh?" put in Crane. "I'm bound down that way myself, on business. I've heard a great deal here and there about that country, and this Air Service border patrol. Is young MacDowell there a fair sample?"

"MacDowell—didn't you call him Tex?" asked Beckman.

"I shore did. That's what he's mostly known by."

"Seems to me that name is familiar——"

"I thought so too," put in Miss White. "I know I've heard that name, and it almost seemed as though his face was familiar——"

"Movies," Trowbridge cut in with his rumbling laugh. "One o' his escapades happened to be caught by a cameraman, and when he was fightin' a big crook named Fitzpatrick down here and the old snake framed 'im, the papers was full of it and they resurrected that film all over again. Tex——"

"That's it!" declared Merle Hopper. "So that's Tex MacDowall, is it?"

"That's him."

Crane put in another question about the patrol, and in a few minutes the sheriff was discoursing pleasurably on the border, and some of the things which periodically broke loose down there. The people of the stage listened with wide-eyed interest, and Crane egged the sheriff on.

Under the spell of the sheriff's picturesque speech the strangers succeeded in forgetting the fact that a dead man was lying almost beneath their feet, and gradually they recovered from the unaccustomed shocks of their recent experiences.

"Here comes Tex," remarked the sheriff as his eyes caught the figure of the flyer approaching across the field.

"And here comes a car in a hurry," added Beckman.

A big auto was speeding swiftly toward them, and when it came closer they could see blue-uniformed men.

"The San Antone police on business bent," stated the sheriff.

He got to his feet, rolled one of those cigarets which seemed so grotesque when designed for the use of a man so huge as he, and went forward to do the honors. The car stopped with grinding brakes, and four men, two of them in uniform, got out. Another car, following the first one closely, was filled to overflowing with reporters.

Trowbridge told the story in about fifteen seconds. As he finished, still a third vehicle which proved to be an ambulance dashed up. While the doctor, with the help of the police, installed the dead man and his wounded accomplice in the ambulance the police and reporters between them were getting the names of all participants as well as additional details of the flurry in crime.

MacDowell lounged up.

"This is sure a festive scene right now," he drawled. "I sweated blood over that telephone——"

"You're the man who made the report?" snapped a square-faced plain clothes man who seemed to be in charge.

"And likewise did most o' the dirty work," laughed Trowbridge.

For several minutes Tex was surrounded with reporters, who were still busy with him when the police and the ambulance left. He towered among the representatives of the press, half of whom were getting details from him and the others collecting various items from the actors. The prominence of all concerned lifted the story into feature front-page stuff, and the newspapermen went to their work with a will.

They had not finished when a dilapidated Ford truck, driven by a rakish mechanic in coveralls, rattled to the scene. After having his curiosity satisfied, the garageman started to work changing three tires on the hired touring car.

"If you boys are through with me I'll lend that fellow a hand," said Tex at length.

The process of changing tires had a big audience, for reporters and late participants in the fracas stood grouped around the busy mechanic and the flyer. Finally the newspapermen left, with the promise—or threat—of later interviews back in town.

"It's a shame the Majestic can't cash in on all this publicity you folks are getting," grinned MacDowell, wiping his smudged face with the back of his hand. "But it'll look good in Variety, anyhow."

"What do you know about Variety?" asked the surprised Beckman, wondering how a border flyer could be familiar with a theatrical weekly.

Tex did not tell the exact truth.

"I went to Yale a few years, and those New York week ends with chorus girls——"

"Ho ho ho!" rumbled the sheriff. "Tell 'em you once played three weeks o' Shakespeare with Robert Mantell!"

"Let my dark past lie," pleaded Tex, while the hilarity of the actors rose in a gale.

It was true that in one of his wandering journeys he had accidentally been inducted into minor rôles in a Shakesperian company for a few weeks.

Having confessed this, he left the further entertainment to the sheriff, and devoted his full attention to work. Finally the job was complete.

"Sheriff, why don't you hit for town with these folks, who by the way I haven't been introduced to yet—and I'll wait for the gang from Donovan Field and see that they get started all right on repairing that wing. I'll join you later."

Trowbridge wanted to stay.

"I ain't no fair weather flyer!" was his way of putting it—but his objections were overruled by Tex and the others, led by Mr. George D. Crane.

"No sense of both of you staying, and really, sheriff, there is a conversation of a semi-business nature which I would like to have with you about the border. I am sure that Lieutenant MacDowell is sincere when he says you're not needed. And by the way, before we all leave, I speak for the pleasure of being host to the whole crowd this evening in honor of our experience."

"There ain't no objections on my part to renewin' my youth," chuckled Trowbridge. "But if it gets back to McMullen that I been carousin' with prominent people o' the stage the remnants o' my reputation'll be gone. I got some business at 9:30 this evenin', but I'll string along as far as I can."

"Fine. And you, Lieutenant MacDowell?"

"I haven't another thing in the world to do."

"We'll consider it settled, then. Well, shall we start back for town?"

At the last minute Beckman and Bernan decided to stay with Tex, who announced his intention of starting work on the ship in anticipation of the arrival of the repair truck from Donovan Field.

"I'll start getting the wings off, and they'll be able to have the old boat ready to ramble by tomorrow," he explained to the sheriff. "We'll be in town by the middle of the afternoon, and then we can go around to the police and get everything settled up before the party."

It was thus settled, and the repaired car finally drove away as Tex and the two actors started for the wounded DeHaviland.

VII

MEANWHILE Graves, sitting quietly in his Pullman on the way from St. Louis to San Antonio, was covertly watching a slim, blond young man in the opposite compartment. The older man was bothered with a conviction that he knew that young fellow, but finally was driven to the decision that there was simply a striking resemblance to some one he had known, for he rarely, if ever, forgot a face.

The young fellow interested him, though. The government man took in the well-groomed appearance of him, and the clean-lined face which might be that of a sophomore at college. The heap of reading matter which the young fellow was perusing, though, was not of a kind usually affected by sophomores. There were three "high-brow" magazines, two of them devoted to books and criticism, as well as a couple of newer publications specializing in comment on current events. At present he was reading a book which had created a storm of comment and for a time been suppressed.

The object of Graves' attention was different from the rest of the travelers in other ways—ways that belied the youthfulness of his appearance. So far as Graves knew, he had not exchanged a word with any other passenger, despite the monotony of the ride and frequent opportunities for social intercourse. On his infrequent excursions into the smoking room he never joined in the free and easy discourse always going on in that male sanctum, but usually smoked a couple of expensive imported cigarets in utter silence, and then disappeared.

Toward noon Graves had the smoking compartment to himself for a while, as the other men had answered the first call to lunch. He was smoking a quiet cigar when the object of his mental activity entered, bearing a toilet kit with him.

The young fellow said nothing, but made rapid preparations for shaving. Graves quietly approved.

"Experienced traveler," he remarked to himself. "Escaped the mob this morning, and picked exactly the right time to do the job in privacy and comfort."

Once again the government agent was bothered with that queer feeling of acquaintance. Obeying a sudden impulse he said:

"I saw you reading 'The Bookfellow' this morning. That article in the Literary Spotlight series on James Gordon was rather peppery, wasn't it?"

The young fellow possed, razor in air, and looked around in surprise.

"It sure was," he agreed, "and very good, although I don't agree with all of it by any means. I've read everything Gordon has written—as a critic, that is—and despite what some better men than I think, I do give him credit for sincerity, at any rate. And I enjoy his resounding whacks at the Puritanical attitude that periodically seeks to kill off anything written except the Pollyanna books, anything painted except chaste landscapes, and anything on the stage except virtue triumphant."

Graves' interest grew. These were surprising words from a frank-faced youngster. Graves himself was a man of broad and ripened culture, with a profound appreciation of fine things. He purposely stimulated the conversation along the lines it had taken, while his mind remained busy groping for the recognition that escaped him.

Finally the last call for lunch sounded, and the older man said—

"Shall we go on down to the dining-car?"

For a moment his young companion hesitated, and then agreed.

During the meal Graves talked idly and charmingly, his low, throaty voice carrying distinctly through the roar of the speeding train. Neither his face nor his conversation gave any indication of his persistent mental quest. His mind was casting around continuously, trying to uncover the reason for his vague familiarity with the young man before him. Finally he broke the brief silence which had fallen by saying:

"I hope you will pardon my curiosity, but you remind me strangely of some one I have known. I can't quite place you, but would you mind telling me your name?"

He was conscious, during the momentary silence, that his companion was inspecting him without haste, as if wondering impersonally what he might be about.

"Not at all," he said finally. "It is Robert Daly."

As soon as he had announced his name Daly was conscious of an unexplainable change in the interesting, prematurely gray man before him. It was though the face had hardened a trifle, although it had not; or that the man had gathered himself, as it were, preparing for action. The eyes, probed his steadily.

"Perhaps it might help my memory if you told me your business," Graves went on, but this time there was nothing of careless inquiry in his words.

Daly, conscious of the feeling that there was something unusual below the surface of the casual conversation, answered after brief hesitation.

"I'm an officer in the army—Air Service."

"On leave, I presume."

"No, sir. I've been transferred from Selfridge Field to McMullen, down on the border."

He was aware immediately of surprise at himself for answering personal questions of this nature—not that there was any reason not to, except that it was foreign to his every native impulse to gratify any curiosity about himself at all, unless for a definite reason.

Nevertheless, he answered more probing questions. It was as if the older man was slowly, easily, and yet inevitably pushing him on. It was far easier to answer them than to resist the indefinable pressure he felt behind every word of the questions.

Graves had seen Daly but once, and that briefly, when the flyer had reported at Washington for instructions in the Bergen case. He was completely satisfied within a few moments that Daly was beyond all doubt the man who was to work for him.

He leaned forward a trifle.

"My name is Graves, and I'm a government man as well as yourself," he said evenly. "You are the man who got Bergen for us a couple of years ago. After lunch is over I'll prove my identity to you, and we'll have a talk about what you are to do when you get to the border."

It was Daly's turn to camouflage his utter surprise. He took a leisurely sip of tea, and his eyes, a queer shadow in them, rested for a moment on Graves' face. He did not have a doubt in the world that Graves was just what he represented himself to be, which was a tribute.

"I'll explain it all in a moment," Graves went on. "I saw you once before, but it seems you have changed a great deal in two years' time."

"Had a wreck and they reconstructed my face," said Daly briefly.

"If you are through, let's adjourn," said Graves, without comment.

His mind never detoured, no matter how tempting the opportunity, when there was business to be done.

They located themselves in an isolated compartment.

"You have no idea that you were ordered to the border for any ulterior motive," Graves said as they seated themselves, brushing aside the amenities to plunge directly into what he had to say. "I know you were. In fact, I was instrumental in ordering you there. This sounds peculiar to you, of course, and hence it is up to me to prove my right to dabble in your affairs. After you satisfy yourself, I will ask you to show me your orders as well."

He handed Daly a long envelope, in which were four sheets of paper bearing two short paragraphs each. Daly's eyes narrowed a bit at the signature and the significance of the written words.

"Here is a card and a badge, and two letters from government officials you have heard of."

It took but a moment for Daly to satisfy himself that he was talking to the man who would be temporarily in command of the border patrol, by order of the commander-in-chief of the Army, and for a purpose not stated. The badge was the gold one of the Secret Service.

"Very well, sir. Here are my orders."

Graves, who had been waiting without saying a word or making any explanation of the papers, glanced at the orders. There had been no doubts whatever in his mind, but he was not in the habit of overlooking any detail whatever.

"All right, Daly. We are well met. Here's the proposition."

Without a superfluous word he spread before Daly the emergency and the method of meeting it. Every sentence was a terse statement of fact, and added a brick to the structure he was building. The flyer got the impression of a machine in which every lever and wheel did its precise work at the proper time as Graves marshalled his facts and plans in logical array, driving inevitably toward a definite goal. The geniality apparent in his previous casual conversation was entirely lacking, and he seemed utterly impersonal. His words were unhurried, but without warmth.

"And so that section of the patrol which handles Texas from El Paso to McMullen will be under my orders for a time. You and MacDowell will be used, when necessary, in a more personal way. Do you know MacDowell?"

"Not personally, but of course by reputation. He's well-known throughout the Air Service."

"I know."

He resumed his even flow of words after the brief hiatus.

"I have asked Mr. William Trowbridge, sheriff of Hidalgo County, to meet me in San Antonio tonight to talk things over. There will probably be a few things to set in motion there before I go on to the border. His territory includes McMullen and also that strip of the Rio Grande which I am inclined to believe will be the scene of action because it is closest to San Antonio, which must inevitably be the first big distributing station as well as the place through which all the supply flows northward. Trowbridge is an old-timer, very efficient, who knows the Southwest like the palm of his hand. Every absolutely trustworthy agency will be used, including Trowbridge's exclusive services, which will, of course, include his advice."

Suddenly Graves smiled, and with it seemed to accomplish his uncanny transformation into his other self.

"Now let's forget business," he said pleasantly. "A little later you'll probably be fed on it pretty continuously. You haven't said that the prospect pleases you —does it?"

For a moment Daly's habitually tightened mouth and uncommunicative eyes seemed to change, like a smoldering coal which flares suddenly.

"I'm tickled to death, sir," he said.

It was not the boyish zest which his apparent youth would have presupposed, and Graves was quick to notice it. It was the more mature, repressed expectation with which a certain type of man meets a proposition of the kind; deeper than the joy of the struggle, and more like the satisfying of some deep craving inherent in his character.

"Good. Now let's forget it, as I said, and talk about things less sordid."

Which they did without interruption, through the six remaining hours of the trip. They fled like the wind, for Daly, and were far from uninteresting to Graves himself. He sensed the contradictions in Daly's character—contradictions as pronounced as the physical difference between youthful face and the rather disillusioned eyes.

With the matured philosophy of a middle-aged man whose fine intellectual equipment had been ripened by a lifetime of amazing experience Graves contributed just enough to the conversation to stimulate Daly. At first the flyer's words were almost abnormally impersonal, but finally he revealed more of himself than he knew. Graves quickly comprehended the fact that Daly's opinions and ideas were self-made, so to speak, and was struck with the independence of his thinking. It was clear that he had not been exposed to a long system of education which usually results in most of the student's convictions being handed him, ready made.

Graves' mature tolerance clashed with the fierce, oftentimes warped cynicism of Daly, and in many things the older man's quiet comments illumined Daly's mind and gave him new angles on the combination of strength and weakness which go to make the man, and the impulses which govern his actions.

It was eight o'clock when the porter commenced brushing the passengers for San Antonio, and the long train was clicking its way over numberless switches as it crawled through the yards.

"Time has passed quickly, and very pleasantly for me," said Graves, looking at his watch.

Daly drew a long breath, and started to speak eagerly. With an obvious effort he checked himself, and the quiet aloofness from which he had been drawn by Graves settled on him again.

"For me, too, sir," he said quietly, and arose at the porter's invitation.

Despite the repression of his words, his soul was filled with contentment. An attractive prospect ahead, and the companionship, for a while, of the sort of man whom he had always wanted to know, and never quite succeeded.

They alighted from the train into the usual bedlam of porters, taxi drivers and newsboys.

"Shall we go to the Gunter? That's where Trowbridge will expect to find me," said Graves, beckoning to a newsboy. "Or have you other plans?"

"Gunter suits me," replied Daly, taking in the familiar scene before him. Rushing memories of those months with Young crowded back on his mind.

They surrendered their baggage to a taxi man, and as they followed him Graves took a cursory look at his paper. His low laugh caused Daly to glance down at the screaming evening sheet.

"Airman and Sheriff Nab Thugs From Air!" screamed the headline, and below was a long story of how Trowbridge and MacDowell had rescued Crane and the actors from the clutches of the highwaymen.

Graves skimmed the story with lightninglike speed.

"The sheriff flew up here with MacDowell," he said. "That young man seems doomed to an exciting career. Well, I'm glad he's here. We'll get busy as soon as we get to the hotel."

VIII

WITHIN an hour after the departure of the sheriff and the others in the rented car a big truck from Donovan Field, which is the greatest flying field in the world and located four miles out of San Antonio, arrived at the scene. By that time Tex, with the fumbling help of Beckman and Bernan, had succeded in dismantling the bruised wing.

He found the two actors to be good fellows, above the average of most men of the stage. The youthful-looking Beckman proved to be over thirty, and he and his wife, known as Collier and Beckman, had been stars for six years in various musical shows as well as vaudeville. They were coheadliners on the bill with West and White, a famous dancing team. Bernan was older still than Beckman, and a well-known legitimate actor who was taking a flyer in vaudeville with a sketch.

They were both good fellows, and seemed to have little of the conceit of the average actor. Tex, hammering on a recalcitrant hinge-holt, passed judgment on them as follows—

"About the first actors I ever saw that really believed there were one or two other people in the world in the same class with them, and they haven't told me how good they are yet!"

When the truck drove up, in charge of a sergeant, Tex gave some brief orders and turned the work over to the chief mechanic and his crew. They had brought extra wings and all needed tools with them.

"You'll see that a guard is left on it until noon tomorrow?" he said in conclusion.

"Yes sir. She'll be all taken care of."

"We'll be starting back around noon tomorrow," nodded Tex. "I'll send food out by car when I get to town—or can the truck tend to that?"

"We brought rations with us, sir."

"Good. And thanks. How about the truck taking us in to San Antonio. This road isn't very well-traveled today, by all appearances.

This was arranged, and toward the middle of the afternoon the two actors and the flyer, the sole load of a five-ton government truck, drew up with a flourish in front of the Gunter Hotel. There was more interviewing to go through with before Tex could escape to a room and have a bath. During this operation he had the civilian clothes he had brought along pressed, and emerged for dinner arrayed in conventional style.

In the civies his height and breadth of shoulder were less pronounced, but there was still a look of the out-of-doors about him. The white shirt threw the deep tan of his face into bold relief, and in the suncrinkled eyes with the level gaze of one accustomed to wide spaces he was patently of a different breed from the pallid, well-groomed actors who were gathered around the highly decorated table in the private dining-room Crane had had specially decorated for the occasion.

The stout New Yorker had clung closely to Sheriff Trowbridge all through the afternoon, and had seated the beaming oldtimer at his right for the dinner. The group which Tex and the sheriff had met that morning had been increased by the remainder of the actors on the ill-fated bill at the Majestic. There was Beckman's demure blond wife, a statuesque young woman who supported Joe Bernan in his sketch, and Merle Hopper's partner—a slim, sandy boy with sunken cheeks and unhealthily bright eyes. The Zarry brothers, acrobats, were also present, as was Miss Claryce Demar, born Kitty Delaney, who worked a trained dog. She was a peroxide blond who gushed incessantly, was fifty years old, looked forty, owned to thirty, and acted as though twenty.

The sprightly Miss Jessica White, she of the sparkling black eyes, was on one side of Tex and the red-haired Merle Hopper on the other. Between them he found that he had little time to eat, for they were insatiable in their thirst for information as to the various events which had brought him into prominence at different times. Tex, however, soon succeeded in turning the conversation into less personal channels.

It was at the finish of the gay meal, just after the waiters had cleared the table, and they were waiting the advent of an orchestra which Crane had hired, that the sheriff sprang a surprise.

"Did I hear right when I thought I understood you to announce that you folks don't play in Dallas next week?" he inquired of Beckman.

"Yes, sir. That theater is closed by the flu epidemic, too."

"Then why don't you folks pile down to McMullen?" boomed the sheriff. "We got a tidy little settlement of fifteen thousand men, women and Spigs, and a show could be fixed up for a night or two in the movie theater that'd at least pay yore expenses. The town'd enjoy it, an' I can promise yuh all the entertainment the town's got, in addition to some supplied by the flyers, prob'ly."

The suggestion was an instant hit. The actors were for it to the last man, and Crane put in his oar as well.

"I think it a great idea, naturally," he said jovially, "inasmuch as I'm going down there any way. You don't mind if I horn in, do you sheriff?"

"The more the merrier——"

The jingle of the telephone interrupted him. Tex answered it.

"Hello. This is Lieutenant MacDowell. Who? Oh yes, Daly. Why come right up here—wait a minute."

He put his hand over the transmitter and turned to the company.

"New fellow just on his way to join the squadron at McMullen, named Daly. Don't mind if he comes up, do you Mr. Crane? He's got a friend of his with him, named Peabody."

"Peabody?" interrupted Trowbridge quickly. "That's the *hombre* I been waitin' tuh see——"

"Bring 'em both up!" laughed Crane, who was a persuasive host.

"Prob'ly Peabody an' I'll be checkin' out before long," said the sheriff.

"Come right up—both of you," directed Tex over the phone.

In a few moments there came a knock on the door, and the flyer opened it. His mouth widened in a smile as he shook hands with Daly.

"I'm glad to know you, Daly—welcome to our city."

"This is Major Peabody," Daly said, indicating Graves, who had coached him beforehand.

"Glad to know you, sir," said Tex, while back of him two men, Trowbridge and George D. Crane, were momentarily paralyzed with surprize.

"*Major* Peabody! What does that mean?" Trowbridge was asking himself swiftly.

"Peabody ——! That's Graves!" the suddenly nervous Crane was thinking to himself. "What's he doing here—and where have I seen that young fellow before?"

"Come in and meet the gang," MacDowell invited, and the two strangers faced the interested gaze of the party.

The distinguished looking Graves was perfectly at ease as Tex commenced the introductions, and slim, blond Daly swept the company casually with his eyes. They caught Crane's intent look.

"Hello there, Crane," said Daly casually. "Don't you remember me?"

"Duke Daly, by ——!" Crane burst out suddenly. "How are you, Duke, and what on earth are you doing here?"

A surprized silence fell over the company, and Tex ceased doing the honors for a moment. Beckman leaned over to whisper to Bernan:

"That is Duke Daly! You know—betting commissioner for the Clover stable for some time——"

Daly shook hands with Crane, and the ever-observant Graves noticed that the opulent-appearing older man seemed to have an unusual attitude of respect for the bronzed flyer.

Daly's thin lips curved in a rather mirthless smile as he looked around after greeting Daly.

"I think I recognize West and White, don't I?" he inquired. "I think I met you at a party one night when you were with the Frivols, Miss White."

"Of course! But you seem—different, Mr. Daly. I——"

"Me too. Didn't know you, son!" Crane chimed in, but his flesh-rimmed eyes were darting toward Graves.

"Had a wreck and they built me a new face," explained Daly.

Introductions went on apace. Tex was growing more and more intrigued with McMullen's prospective addition. He had noted the middle-aged, supposedly wealthy Crane's respect for the young fellow he had called "The Duke," and also noted that a majority of the stage folk seemed to be familiar with who Duke Daly was, and to yield him a considerable measure of interest and respect.

He was trying to plumb this Major Peabody, likewise. There was a tantalizing memory which he could not quite grasp connected with the stocky, powerfully-built man with the broad face and those remarkably full, clear eyes.

As the gay chatter arose once more after introductions were over MacDowell noticed that the genial Crane took no part in it, and he had formerly been the heart and soul of the jollification. Daly was talking easily with an interested group, and Peabody was also chatting pleasantly with two of the girls. He noticed Crane's eyes roving constantly toward the gray-haired newcomer, as though hypnotized.

"Seems to be a regular old-home week," he soliloquized.

"Lieutenant MacDowell, I understand you're the man that just ruined old Dave Fitzpatrick down this way," remarked Daly, lowering his voice a trifle.

"Well, I guess I was a little burr under his saddle when he got unseated," returned the Texan gently. "Why?"

"I want to extend my personal thanks," laughed Daly, whose quiet repression was now less obvious. "In 1915 I shot that half-breed son of his, Pablo Fitzpatrick, over in Nueva Laredo. I had to get off the border then, and I guess I wouldn't last long even now if old Dave was alive!"

Suddenly the table danced and shivered under the blow of a mighty fist.

"You ain't the felluh done *that?*" roared the old sheriff. "Boy, howdy. Shake hands with an old man."

Trowbridge had overheard the low-voiced remark.

Daly complied with a smile.

"I had to do it, I guess, and from what I can hear it was good riddance."

"Yore plumb right."

MacDowell's wide mouth quirked at the corners.

"I've got a feeling I'll enjoy knowing this Daly," he told himself.

The voice of the supposed Major Peabody made itself heard above the volley of questions which were being flung at the nonplussed Daly and the sheriff.

"I'm about to ask a very great favor," he said urbanely, smiling at the company. "I'm on my way to take command at McMullen, you know, and there are a few little things I'd like to talk over with my two Lieutenants here, as well as Sheriff Trowbridge. It won't take long, but it will save me considerable time here in San Antonio, and perhaps with their help I can have the pleasure of traveling down to the border with you all tomorrow. Will you excuse me if I take them away with me for about half an hour?"

Crane came to himself with an effort.

"Sure thing, major. But let's not make it any longer. There's an orchestra coming —nothing doing in the dining-room or anywhere else on account of this flu scare—and we'll try and have a good time."

Tex was completely dumfounded at the Major's words. He felt a firm pressure on his foot—Daly was standing beside him—and looked around quickly. Daly did not meet his gaze, but smiled slightly. MacDowell looked over at the sheriff, who was likewise having difficulty in maintaining his composure.

The man who had made the amazing announcement looked at them with the hint of a smile, and then went on easily—

"Well then, if you'll pardon us we'll retire, and I promise you that these two youngsters will be back in time to trip the light fantastic toe."

They adjourned to Graves' room, which was on the floor above. They did not bother with the elevator, but walked up, the sheriff with Graves and Daly with MacDowell.

"You seemed to fall among friends," Tex remarked.

"I've just run into them here and there," returned Daly carelessly.

"I'm restraining myself from falling in a faint by main strength," Tex went on as they turned down the hall. "That last spiel of Major Peabody's——"

"His right name is Graves, and he's no more a major than you are, but you'll hear all about it in a minute," said Daly, and smiled slightly as he glanced at the surprized face beside him. Then he saw the gray eyes flame suddenly with joyous light, and it seemed as though something had flared suddenly within Tex and was peeping out through his eyes. His personality seemed to leap out at Daly, and the Duke suddenly realized why he had heard so much of the man beside him.

"I'll last through the wait, I presume," said Tex gently. "Your words are strangely appealing, though. I think you'll like it at McMullen. It's a good place now, but you seem to hint that its going to be better."

Daly nodded. Clearly this was a man after his own heart, he reflected.

They entered the small room and found chairs. The easy urbanity which had cloaked Graves back in the dining-room fell from him as his level gray brows drew slightly together and his eyes swept the waiting three.

"All of you except Daly are in somewhat of a mental muddle," he said without preamble. "If you'll listen carefully I'll clear you up a bit."

Once again he was driving toward a goal. Without gesture or particular vocal emphasis he swept on, building for Trowbridge and Tex the complete story he wanted them to know. As he leaned over to toss a match in the cuspidor his profile sprang into being for a moment, and the lounging Tex nodded slightly to himself.

Graves, in three swift sentences, described how, from his vantage point in Washington, he had been able to trace the way in which the flood of drugs was constantly washing further and further from the parent stream, so to speak, which led straight northward to the Great Lakes.

"Our efforts at outlying points have been abortive," he said. "It is clear that a powerful and able person or persons are at the head of this, and that they have perfected a system of transportation and distribution which is a masterpiece in its way. However, the fact that we haven't got far means little. It is a characteristic of modern criminality on a large scale that it is so organized that getting one section of the ring usually means that the men higher up—the center of operations—escape. I frequently liken it to fighting an octopus which, after you cut off one tentacle, retires to some subterranean place where one can't get at it.

"By the time we rounded up the St. Louis crowd, say, the warning would be out and all the rest of them retire into hiding and the whole business stop for a while with the real criminals still unapprehended, except by accident. So I am on the ground to cut off things at the source.

"I am convinced that the strip between McMullen and El Paso is our stamping ground, with chances good that it will be within two hundred miles of McMullen. I say this because San Antonio here starts the trail, and they'd naturally use some section of the border as near San Antonio as possible.

"The method of work will be this. I have papers with me which will make me nominal C. O. of the McMullen flight, temporarily, and likewise put the border patrol flights at Laredo, Del Rio, Sanderson, Marfa and El Paso under my direct control. As soon as possible I will make a trip along the border with you two flyers to get things set. Starting then, the border patrol will work in relays, covering that entire eight hundred miles continuously from dawn to dark. Every other government agency, as well as the Rangers and others whom, with the help of the sheriff here, I shall enlist, will also be working at top speed, with a definite objective.

"The task of doing all this in secrecy is tremendous, but I think we can manage it. It will go hard with any individual who gives the slightest inkling that we are on the ground using extraordinary means to round up the biggest smuggling operation of years.

"With all this machinery in motion, as well as a constant series of reports from every city under surveillance, it will not be long before we have something to work on. That is when you two gentlemen start to get busy. I believe that I can keep myself successfully in the background by means of my camouflage as Major Peabody, C. O. of McMullen. Of course, what you fellows will do depends on what comes up. We'll decide that when we get our start."

MacDowell's eyes were dancing with delight at the prospect. He looked over at Daly, and the slight smile on the other flyer's face held a quality which MacDowell understood, and he then and there hailed him as a kindred spirit.

"Some months ago Sleepy Spears, one o' the McMullen flyers, got mixed up in a gang that pretty near succeeded in gettin' a load o' drugs transported by government airplane," said Trowbridge. "That was when San Antone here had a drug flurry—little one."

"I've been thinking along that line while you were talking, too," put in Tex. "Did you ever give the air any thought in connection with this matter, sir?"

"I have," replied Graves directly. "It's a possibility. Our agents are working with that possibility in mind, and if it is so it will complicate our work tremendously. The possibilities of crooks using the air while the agents of the law are held on the ground are staggering. Let's hope they haven't started it yet."

"Yuh'll have a considerable number o' agents now that ain't held to the ground by no means," rumbled the sheriff with a chuckle.

"I know it," smiled Graves. "By the way, Daly, who is Crane? He's not an actor, is he?"

"No, he says he's down here on business. When I knew him he was in politics in New York, having retired as a grafting contractor. Used to be quite a sporting light—still is, I guess. Used to be around the New York racetracks a lot, prominent first-nighter and man-about Times Square. He had a big acquaintance among actors, prize-fighters, race-horse men and that crowd. Kind of a two-for-a-cent Diamond Jim Brady, he tried to be."

"Says he's down here looking over the border with an idea to starting a kind of big amusement place on the Mexican side racetrack, gamblin' places, and all that stuff," the sheriff put in. "Says Juarez and Tia Juana are kind o' crude for the wealthy trade an' that since prohibition a real high-class Monte Carlo and Havana combined 'd be a payin' venture for the wealthy playboys who been hit by the reformers."

"I see."

"He seemed to be watching you pretty close. He doesn't know you, does he?" asked MacDowell, and Daly nodded in agreement with the first statement.

"I don't know him—and it would be a serious matter if he knew me, perhaps. He might talk. However, from what you say I don't think it is possible. I am certain that I have never seen him before. The reason we are using you gentlemen so thoroughly is because I am convinced that any project as big as this and as expertly handled as this presupposes one thing, at least; namely, that the conspirators have the government agents pretty well spotted. Experience has proven this. It is my conviction that some government agents must have been bribed in this matter—if not, the way they have avoided detection is uncanny."

Tex put in some more questions, which Graves answered without a second's hesitation and with laconic directness.

"Well, I guess that's enough for tonight, as far as you two are concerned," he smiled finally, relapsing into leisurely sociability again. "Go back and have your party, while the sheriff and I talk over some other things. You say that you are returning by air tomorrow, MacDowell?"

"Yes sir."

"Daly and I will come along by train, which will bring us in day after tomorrow. Could we start for our tour of the border stations the following morning—Friday?"

"So far as I'm concerned."

"Good."

The two flyers went out. Tex noticed casually that a man was turning the corner toward the elevators.

"I know where I saw Graves before," he remarked to Daly. "He came down to Langham Field last summer, got a Martin Bomber and two flyers named Broughton and Hinkley, and came back next day after having swiped Hayden, that big railroad robber, right from under the noses of his gang. I was up there bombing battleships. I didn't meet him, but I saw him around. We never knew who he was, exactly—Broughton and Hinkley wouldn't tell a thing, and when it got into the newspapers later no names were mentioned—just an 'agent.' Jim and Larry got all the publicity."

"Notoriety would spoil his usefulness, largely," suggested Daly.

As they entered the dining room, which had been transformed into a temporary dancing space, the orchestra was tuning up.

"Here they are," Crane hailed them genially. "Now I'm going to excuse myself for a few moments."

He went out, and MacDowell, to whom close observation was natural by instinct and training, noticed that for a moment the small eyes of the man belied his smiling mouth and good-natured round face. He seemed to be trying to probe into the mind of the flyer as their eyes met.

Crane went out and took the elevator. In his own room a small, thin, black-haired fellow with a swarthy face of Semitic cast was awaiting him, walking up and down and smoking a cigaret.

"Well?" demanded Crane, his face pasty and white.

"Soon's I got your call I come around here. I know Baldy Frank, the clerk that's on. I seen what room this here Peabody had an' got the room next to it. Figured that'd be better than runnin' a chance on hangin' around the halls. I give the bell boy the air and sneaked in by myself. I couldn't hear nothin' to speak of, though, Mr. Crane, honest. Just got snatches o' their lip here and there. I heard this here Peabody say 'we must put a stop to this thing at its source' or somethin' like that and then again he says somethin' about 'usin' you two for this reason' and the last thing—the only thing I caught plainlike, was somethin' about 'can we start on this tour o' the border stations Friday.' "

"Stay in that room until they leave tomorrow. Is the clerk all right? Didn't he think it funny you wanted that room?"

"Sure. But he's a friend o' mine. Soon's he found out there wasn't no woman concerned he should worry. I'll fix him all right. I've always found it handy t' know hotel clerks."

Crane nodded, and began to pace the room swiftly.

"It's Graves as sure as fate—the only man they got that'd stand a chance to get us, —— him!"

His head bent in thought, he continued his pacing. Finally:

"When I slipped out and phoned you I had a feeling there was something up. You did well, Sam, and I won't forget it. That'll be all for now."

"Guess you'd better croak this Graves feller, hadn't you?" suggested the hook-nosed little Jew, gazing at his chief curiously.

"We'll see."

"Well, so long," and Sam departed.

For fifteen minutes Crane's mind worked swiftly, marshalling the meager facts, going over known factors in the situation. At the end of the quarter-hour he had succeeded in reassuring himself, as well as deciding on a plan. He sent two long telegrams, in code: one to a submerged office-holder in Washington who had a certain amount of influence, and the other to Mr. Charles Knugel, at a Little Rock address. Then he went back to the party and assumed his duties as a genial, accomplished and lavish host.

As a result of those telegrams the submerged politician dropped over to the War Department, and that day a communication left addressed to the Commanding Officer of McMullen. And on the receipt of another wire in the late afternoon Mr. Charles Knugel left for McMullen, bearing papers to show that he was an honest-to-God lieutenant in the Reserve Corps.

IX

IT WAS still pitch dark the following Friday morning when the horrible clamor of the battered alarm-clock alongside the tousled brown head of Tex MacDowell awakened him.

"Oh, ——," he groaned like a lost soul.

Then the prospect before him came into his mind, and the piercing chill of a Texas Winter morning lost some of its horrors. He switched on the electric light, and the interior of his barren living quarters sprang into view. The little pyramidal tent, furnished frugally with table, chair, cot and clothes hooks, had been his place of abode for so long a time that living indoors for any length of time would have suffocated him.

He hit the floor with a bound, and in a second had torn off his pajamas and was enveloped in a bathrobe. With towels and toilet kit he ran down the boardwalk to the bath house, where he found Graves just emerging and Daly in the process of a brisk rubdown.

In a few moments Tex himself made the plunge under a flood of stinging coldwater, and proceeded to do a dance as energetic and meaningless as the best effort of a ballet. Daly noted with admiration the smoothly rippling muscles, powerful shoulders and tapering hips of the young giant before him.

"Trained down like a race-horse," he commented.

Fifteen minutes later the protesting Chink was serving them with bacon, eggs and coffee, and from the line came the noise of warming motors.

Tex was to carry Graves in his De Haviland, while Daly's passenger was a mechanic. They emerged from the mess hall into the dim gray dawn. The two De Havilands were roaring away wide open now, and the flame from their exhaust pipes sent fiery streamers through the half-light.

Daly and Tex were in leather coats and huge gauntlets, while Graves had decided on a furlined flying suit for his attire. Beneath it he wore the full uniform of a Major of Air Service.

As they walked toward the ships a big car turned into the airdrome and purred down the line of hangars toward them.

"Now who might that be?" asked Tex in surprize. "By George, there's another one."

"The actors!" exclaimed Daly with a laugh, and so it proved.

"We just had to see you off!" proclaimed Elsie West from the front seat of the first car. Every one was there, even the two acrobats. Crane had left McMullen the night before, pleading a few day's business in Mexico.

"We also wanted to vamp you back again as quickly as possible," smiled the piquant Merle Hopper, her red hair tossing in the early morning Gulf breeze.

Tex, arriving by air several hours before the train had pulled in the day before, had primed the anticipatory flight to do its best, and Sheriff Trowbridge had been busy likewise. The visiting artists were assured of being wined and dined to the queen's taste, and plans had already gotten under way for one of the famous hangar dances.

"Well, we're sorry we can't tarry, but we've got eight hundred miles ahead of us," said Tex. "It sure was as foolish a thing as you ever did to burrow out of the feathers this early—and also as nice."

"That's better," laughed Jessie White. "We don't get up before we go to bed for everybody. My ——, girls, just think of the day ahead of us!"

They watched while Daly and Tex crawled into the front seats of the two gently idling monsters of the air. Tex took his usual lightning-like survey of the instruments, and then opened the throttle wide for a final tryout. Daly's ship was roaring away, likewise, and for a moment bedlam broke loose. The two pilots nodded their O. K., and Graves and Sibley, the young mechanic who was to go along, got in the back seats. With a last wave to the wide-eyed onlookers the De Havilands trundled up the field, turned, and roared past their audience again on the take-off.

The ground was hidden behind pearly mists which the slanting rays of the sun colored in faintly beautiful arrows of light. As the De Haviland drove upward and onward toward Laredo Tex noticed that the Rio Grande could not be seen—visibility was very poor until the sun melted the fog away.

At two thousand feet he leveled out, and throttled the motor a bit more. The tachometer read fourteen hundred and fifty revolutions now. He looked around for Daly, and found the other ship riding along fifty feet back of him and perhaps ten feet higher. The Texan watched it for a moment, and then nodded in approval as he saw that Daly was flying in perfect formation with him. There is no greater test of expert airmanship and delicate judgment of speed and distance than formation flying.

It requires absolutely accurate handling of a ship weighing close to two tons, traveling at a hundred miles an hour—and with no brakes to apply. It is done with the motor alone, and consequently the pilot must literally foresee the necessity of throttling or increasing the rotations per minute, for the response is slow and gradual. Unless the flyer detects instantly any increase or decrease in the rushing progress of the plane under him his position is lost, and perhaps a collision awaits. Fifty feet is not much leeway for thousands of pounds traveling at that speed.

Having passed judgment on Daly as a pilot, Tex settled to his work. It was not such an easy job to pick his course for a while, even though the territory was so familiar to him, for the world below was blanketed in a heavy shroud of mist that made observation of any sort almost impossible. Within three-quarters of an hour, however, the fog was breaking into streamers and occasional slices of the terrain could be seen.

They were soon spiraling down over the airdrome at Laredo. It was small, like all those border fields which have been cleared in the mesquite, and the hard-packed sand meant a long roll after hitting the ground. Tex, with the ease of long experience, dropped over the northern boundary in a half-stall which required infinitely delicate use of the controls to keep the ship level, for the controls were only partly effective due to lack of speed. He hit the ground hard, but with the absolute minimum of forward motion, and stopped rolling well within the safety limit.

He watched Daly, whose flying had been almost entirely restricted to huge flying fields where there was perhaps a square mile of grassy expanse for a landing. Once again the big southerner gave his approval—Daly dropped toward the ground in a steep side-slip, straightened, fishtailed the De Haviland by the use of his rudder and thus killed speed by means of the resulting skid, and then made a smooth three-point landing.

"He can handle himself," nodded MacDowell, and turned to smile at Graves as he motioned toward the other ship.

A radiogram had been sent on from McMullen, and so the travelers did not waste a minute. While busy mechanics under MacDowell's eye gassed and oiled the ships Graves was talking to the flyers of the Laredo flight. In three-quarters of an hour the voyagers were on their way. It was characteristic of the driving Graves that in that length of time he had made everything clear to the young men of Laredo, with additional instructions to the C. O. to be ready with any questions when the McMullen men dropped in on the return flight.

Del Rio, where a hut in the middle of the large level expanse which was the field made it look like almost anything else; Sanderson, the small field hemmed in by towering mountains; Marfa, nestling in the fastnesses of the Big Bend country—and at all places advance radiograms had made the flyers ready, and Graves carried his message and gave his instructions. All airdromes were alike in being small, decorated with great hangars of corrugated iron or canvas, and there was a curious kinship in the flyers. They were tall and short, thin or fat, ranging in age from twenty to thirty-five, but despite outward differences of that sort the Washington man could discern something fundamentally alike in them; a resemblance which went farther than surface matters of uniform attire, bronzed faces, and similar living conditions.

There is a stamp which the out-of-doors leaves on a man which goes deeper than its physical result, and there was in all the airmen a look about the eyes which was a combination of hours spent with spaces more vast than a landsman can realize, plus the expression born in them by frequent coming to grips with death. Even the youngest and most devil-may-care of them had spent many moments when there was only a slim chance for life, and the hours of their daily patrol were gambles with fate, and so it was that in them there was that assured capability which comes from hard experience.

The sun was sinking toward the western horizon when the weary, oil-grimed airmen started on their last lap. Below them in unbroken billows stretched the vast, dun chaparral of the Big Bend, perhaps the last surviving haunt in the United States for the outlaws of a still young country. To Daly, steeped in the lore of the southwest through his youthful experience, there was a lively interest in surveying that vast country from the air, and he caught his breath as he realized the extent of it.

He wondered whether even the old-timers had any real idea of the bigness of their stamping grounds. That gray-green stretch below, where even now men were probably lifting hard eyes to watch the tiny specks sweeping over them, could have held some New England States.

And it was typical of the hazards of the patrol. There was nowhere to land if even two sparkplugs in the mighty Liberty should fail, and a landing be forced. Nothing to do but hurl the ship into the trees, and trust to the flyers' gods.

Even to MacDowell, accustomed as he was to the constant strain of listening for a break in the rhythmic bellow of the motor, and constantly surveying the signboards of the Liberty on the instrument board ahead of him, there was a rushing sense of relief when the two DeHavilands hurled themselves across the towering mountain range and El Paso and Juarez lay spread in the slanting light, separated by the turgid Rio Grande, and connected by a thin tentacle which was the famous international bridge. Fort Bliss seemed but a step from the doll city, although it was several miles.

As he throttled the motor and started a gradual dive toward the earth, which was an even mile below, Tex was conscious of the fact that he was very, very tired. He wondered how Daly had stood it.

Further and further back came the throttle, until the motor was only turning up a thousand, and the ship spiraled earthward over the big landing field at Fort Bliss. Daly was following him down, his ship describing graceful, curving sweeps through the air. Side by side the two bombers sped across the fence, and Tex was relieved that Daly was landing with excess speed, for the rarefied air made a ship drop disconcertingly when the speed was still more than sufficient to keep it in the air under ordinary climatic conditions.

As they taxied to the hangars they were met by waiting mechanics and most of the flyers of the El Paso flight. Tex turned off the gas and allowed the motor to tun itself out before he snapped off the switches. The noise had no sooner died in a sputter than he heard Graves' voice, which came to him dimly because of the buzzing in his ears. He turned around and looked at his passenger, curious to see how he had stood a trip which had left the pilot himself tired and worn out.

Graves had removed his helmet, and his gray hair was matted down on his head. His goggles had left huge red welts around his eyes, and the fine lines around his mouth were now deep furrows. Every line of his face expressed utter weariness, except the brilliant eyes, which glowed from his oil-grimed countenance with undiminished energy.

"There is no reason why we cannot start back tomorrow, is there?" Graves asked directly.

"No, sir," answered the pilot, divided between amazement and admiration.

"Good. I'll get busy with this flight immediately. We'll stay out here, I presume."

"Yes, sir," put in Captain Blair from the side of the fuselage, where he had been waiting to greet the newcomers whose advance radio had aroused so much interest.

"Can you get your flight together immediately?"

"Yes, sir. And your ships will be in apple pie condition for tomorrow if we have to work all night."

"Thank you, captain. That will be fine. Introduce me to your young men, if you will, and then lead the way to where we talk."

In two minutes he was striding swiftly toward headquarters with the flyers of the El Paso flight behind him.

X

IT WAS in the late afternoon of the next day—Saturday—that the two ships were driving steadily eastward, a half hour out of Sanderson. They had been held up at Marfa by a leaking manifold, and there was no chance that they could make McMullen by night, but Del Rio could be reached before darkness fell.

Tex was whiling away the time by thinking ahead to possible future developments. Already on their return trip there was ample evidence that the border was bestirring itself. Along the stations of the patrol men were working day and night in preparation for the feverish activity to come. Motors and ships were being readied for the strain of continuous service, men on leave were being recalled, the radio apparatus and the repair shops were being put in such condition that the chance of their failing should be made as remote as possible.

Back in Hidalgo County Sheriff Trowbridge was organizing his cohorts, adding trusted deputies, and communicating with certain reliable oldtimers all along the border. From headquarters in El Paso, the night before, the tireless Graves had sent out secret instructions to the customs men. Cavalry patrols on the ground were being called in for special orders, and the Texas Rangers, on the telegraphed word of their chief up in Austin, were ready for extraordinary service.

Tex was wondering how long the necessary secrecy would obtain. Enlisted men and officers alike had been cautioned that swift and severe punishment awaited any man who let the slightest hint of what was going on escape him.

Suddenly the flyer came to himself with a snap. The motor had sputtered. With set face MacDowell's eyes swept the gages in front of him. Everything was all right, except that the oil pressure was a trifle low—only twenty. Then he noted the tachometer. The needle had dropped to thirteen hundred revolutions a minute, and the ship was loggy for lack of speed.

Came another sputter, then for a few seconds the Liberty missed consistently. MacDowell, with throttle and spark, tried to make it hit again by means of sudden flushing with gas, in the event that a plugged jet was responsible for the miss. Suddenly a vast silence fell in place of the roar of the motor, and the great propellor slowed its revolving quickly until it finally was turning lazily through the force of the air stream alone.

Tex nosed down to keep flying speed, and his narrowed eyes conned the mesquite below. Not a possible landing field. There was one tiny clearing, perhaps twenty-five yards square. That was his only hope—a mighty dim one—that he and Graves might escape with a crash that would leave them no more than slightly hurt.

Subconsciously Tex noted that Daly had seen his trouble, and was spiraling down behind him.

Then started one of those short breathless struggles which are the frequent lot of a flyer. Down to fifteen hundred feet came the ship in a slow spiral, around and around that tiny clear space in the desert. There was one chance for them, and Tex was going to take it. It was a gamble—possible safety if it succeeded, sure death if his mastery of a ship should falter.

The rustling of the 'squite indicated a north wind. After a steep downward turn which made the landing and flying wires shrill their protest at the speed Tex brought the ship level at five hundred feet, pointed northward toward the clearing. He did not look around at Graves, and he was but dimly conscious of the subdued drone of Daly's ship following him down.

He was perhaps a hundred yards back of the clearing now, headed into the wind, and four hundred feet high. The ship was level, and with every last portion of skill and nerve there was in him Tex set himself to stall down into that clearing.

There is no feat in flying which can be compared to the skill needed for a stall. The ship, being without flying feed, drops, and it is the job of the pilot to keep it dropping level, so that the wings will break the fall. Being almost without flying speed, the controls are of very small effect, and ahead the heavy motor is always striving to pull the ship into a nose dive. And a nose dive or a spin within five hundred feet of the ground means a headlong dash into the earth, for there is not sufficient altitude to regain control.

To hit that clearing in a straight downward drop was MacDowell's task—to keep the teetering ship level by anticipating every move. If one wing dropped so much as a few inches before he caught it the abortive controls would be useless to bring it level again. Should the nose drop, or get up too high——

There was the fruit of two thousand hours in the air and the skill born of a hundred emergencies apparent in that fast dropping ship. Time after time, hovering always on the brink of falling off, Tex, by the slightest of movements, caught it in time. The tiniest overcontrol would be just as fatal as an instant's hesitancy.

A hundred feet high, and they were almost over the southern edge of the clearing. The north wind that had helped them, headed into it as they were, would naturally be less powerful closer to the ground. Fifty feet, and they were over the center of it, dropping with a rush, but still level.

MacDowell flung up his goggles for the crash. He hauled back on the stick as the nose started to drop, but this time the controls were absolutely useless. There was the crash of splintering wood as the motor tore through the top of a mesquite tree. As it struck the tail of the ship snapped downward. The fuselage buckled and crumpled against the ground as the tree, for a second, acted as a brake on the motor. The Liberty buckled back on the fuselage for a moment, and then tore straight down through the edges of the limbs. Had it come back six inches more Tex would have been flattened like a pancake.

In the bedlam of tearing canvas and cracking wood Tex was conscious of being thrown to the ground on his side with stunning force. The whole front end of the fuselage, including his cockpit, had twisted sideward. The belt was still buckled around him, and he was attached to the seat. Splintered wood and tangled wires were all about him, the smoking motor not five feet away.

With the horror of fire strong upon him Tex literally lifted himself by his mental bootstraps above the wave of nauseating weakness which threatened to overcome him, and scrambled loose. In a second he saw that despite the gaping gas tank there was no stench of gasolene in the air, and there were no flames leaping from the motor.

He turned to look for Graves, standing lopsidedly to ease the pain in his left foot. It must have been wrenched—caught in the rudder bar, perhaps—then he saw his passenger. That is he saw one foot, grotesque in the unsullied sheen of the shoe and puttee, thrust forth from a heap of commingled linen, wire and wood.

MacDowell pawed away the wreckage like a dog going after a rabbit in its burrow. In a minute he came to his man. The heavy machine gun scarf mount was jammed down on one leg, just above the knee, and Grave's body was half in and half out of the totally wrecked cockpit. The belt had frayed in the crash. Graves was unconscious, but alive. Steadying himself, Tex lifted the limp body from the wreckage, subduing a wave of pain through his left foot as he did so. Graves' face was curiously tranquil—almost spiritual looking. Clearly he had not been knocked unconscious while in the throes of terror, at any rate.

"Thoroughbred!" said MacDowell aloud as he laid the body gently on the ground.

He quickly made sure that there were no broken limbs. He was tearing the flying suit open when he suddenly froze into immobility, and lifted eyes that were suddenly bleak to the sky. The steady roar of Daly's low-circling plane had died into nothingness, and from the ground Tex could see the lazily turning propellor which meant a dead motor.

Quietly he watched. The plane was aimed for the clearing, but with the wreck in it already there was little choice between the trees and the open space.

The Texan was morally certain that death lay at the end of that dive. His clean-cut face was suddenly old and bitter as he watched, and waited. He rose to his feet as a thought struck him, and with one eye on the plane rushing earthward he sought for the fire extinguisher in the wreckage of his own ship.

Having found it he straightened, while seconds like eternities passed. Not fifty feet away from him, over the trees, he saw the bomber suddenly lose speed, nose in the air. That moment, at a lumbering, torturing run, the flyer started. In another second came the grinding crash as the monster of the air smashed through tearing trees to the earth.

As he dodged through the mesquite there was a picture in the Texan's mind—of a slim, blond young fellow standing tall and straight in the doorway of the San Antone hotel, eyes sweeping the unexpected company with quiet curiosity. Duke Daly of the boyish face and uncanny poise.

The wreck was a terrible one. Bits of the controls and wings hung from the trees, and one small bushy mesquite tree was splintered into the ground by the motor. The ship was an inextricable mass, and there was no sign of either passenger. With a gasp of relief Tex saw that the motor was not in the heap, nor on it—the fuselage had broken cleanly in front of the pilot's seat and the motor was still in its bed, half-buried in the ground a few feet from the fuselage.

With eager hands MacDowell tore away the wreckage. A mangled, bloody arm met his gaze:

"Hello, Tex! So this is the border!"

A helmeted head arose from behind a piece of canvas, and a bloody face set with two flaming eyes met MacDowell's relieved gaze. Daly's words were quiet, although his appearance was that of a wild man.

"Hurt?"

"Wait till I see."

Various portions of the wreckage moved while Daly tried out his body.

"One arm sore as ——, otherwise seem to be all together. How about——"

"Dead, I'm afraid," Tex replied to the unfinished question as he exposed the terribly mangled body of the young mechanic. The boy was dead, head and face and body a crushed heap of smeared flesh.

Daly's expression did not change. Only in the eyes which he bent on the gruesome thing before him was there any reaction, and in them brooded that lurking shadow of tragedy—of a temporary rebellion against fate which nevertheless is not a real rebellion because there is understanding there—an adventurer's acceptance of the toll of the job.

There was a momentary silence, while thoughts akin wove through the minds of the two quiet, blood-smeared flyers.

"Tough luck," said Tex gently.

Daly shrugged slightly, and the two men's eyes met in understanding.

"How about Mr. Graves?" asked Daly.

"Alive, and doesn't seem badly hurt—still unconscious when I left him. Let's go. Sure you're all right?"

"Uh huh. And you?"

"Left foot slightly under the weather, but still able to help out," returned Tex.

They made their way to the other plane, and found Graves' eyes open.

"Both planes wrecked?" he asked directly.

"Yes, sir. How do you feel?"

"Not so bad. There's a pretty bad pain through my back, and I can't move this right leg at all. I got twisted, I think, but I doubt if there's anything the matter but some bruises and strained ligaments. Everybody come out all right?"

"Sibley was killed—badly smashed up," Tex replied, rolling a cigaret. "It——"

He left the sentence unfinished as his eyes swept the darkening sky. Hadn't he heard the noise of a motor?

"I thought I heard a motor—there's a ship!" he said, pointing eastward.

Daly picked it up without effort, but Graves could not see it.

"Not a patrol ship, either!" Tex went on slowly, as his expert eye took in the outlines of the craft high in the sky above them.

Daly agreed with him. While it was not possible to get the exact lines of the plane, both men grew certain, as the ship passed overhead, that it was not a De Haviland. In a moment it turned and headed eastward again, giving no sign of having seen the wreckage below.

"No use trying to signal anything," MacDowell said so slowly that there was almost a space between each word.

Daly, looking at him, suddenly felt as though the Texan's personality had leaped out at him, like a definite physical force. The gray eyes were glowing softly.

Without a word he made a brief inspection of the gas tank of his ship. When he came back, lounging along abstractedly, he dropped to the ground with a grimace of pain.

"Two motors go dead within a few minutes of each other—go dead, mind you!" he drawled. "That, in connection with the condition of my ship here and what I seem to have noticed more or less in yours, Duke, means just one thing. We only had a little gas. And the only way we could have had just a few gallons of gas instead of full tanks—did you try your reserve tank?" he broke off suddenly.

"Didn't work," returned Daly briefly.

Graves' eyes were on the Texan's face, a glinting light in them as he watched the flyer work things out in his mind.

"Same with mine. That means, *caballeros*, that we were double-crossed in Sanderson!"

Graves nodded slightly.

"Exactly my conclusions, Lieutenant, although I'm no expert on planes. As to how it was done——"

"There was fifteen minutes, when you were talking to the crowd there taking up details, when there wasn't a living soul on the line. That is, there shouldn't have been. It would have been an easy matter for somebody in uniform to have slipped in and drained out most of the gas, or it may be that one of the Sanderson soldiers was bribed. But, Mr. Graves, why was it done? There must be somebody who is wise to you, and starting to get you. Daly and I along with you, by necessity—me being in the same ship and Daly along to give the alarm if anything goes wrong."

The Texan's eyes were flaming into Graves', although the lax attitude of his body and the softly slurred speech was unchanged. Nevertheless, there was a kind of inner fire discernible in the man that both his companions were quick to feel.

"Your reasoning, to my mind, is exactly correct," said Graves tersely.

"Here's another thing that you may not have thought of," Tex went on. "People as up on flying as they seem to be would know that there was a fifty-fifty chance of some of us coming out of a dead-motor forced landing in the 'squite with some kick left in us. They are bound to figure that. So what would be more natural than that the strange ship just now floating above us in the open ozone should be theirs; and that sometime tonight knowing where we are and that we can't get far away, they should drop around and make sure their work didn't miscarry?"

"Just what do you mean?" inquired

Daly, who had been following MacDowell's reasoning processes with unswerving attention.

"As I see it, they know Graves is on the job and are afraid of him. We're just necessary incidentals—you and I. They know now that some of us are alive, and they know where we are. If they're so dead anxious to get rid of Graves, what could be sweeter from their point of view than to slip around before we can get to civilization, mash Mr. Graves on the head, throw him in the wreck here, and then maybe burn it? A very artistic and suave method of murdering and getting away with it, that would be."

The musically-slurred words, spoken so casually, brought a moment's silence.

"It is a strong possibility, gentlemen," said Graves finally. A spasm of pain crossed his face as he moved slightly. "We must always keep in mind the fact that these men are playing for millions. And every detail of their work spells audacity and skill."

"If it weren't for Mr. Graves being hurt, I'd be in favor of waiting around on the chance that they might come, and nabbing 'em," grinned the Texan.

That familiar characteristic of his—sticking his head in the lion's mouth on the chance of swallowing the lion before he himself disappeared, would have brought a grin to the faces of Captain Kennard and Sheriff Trowbridge and others who had been on the ground during some of MacDowell's previous escapades.

"As it is, though, we're about twenty five miles from the Rio Grande and civilization, and night cometh upon us apace, as the poets have it. Mr. Graves, I know you couldn't walk a mile if by so doing you could nab this whole gang. My suggestion is that we waste no time in getting you somewhere where you can be fixed up. With our leather coats and a couple of pieces of wood we can make a stretcher and carry you. We'll get in by morning. Aravista is almost due south of here, and being a born and bred Texan I can promise we won't travel in circles through this forsaken pimple on the face of the earth."

Most men of anywhere near Graves calibre would have expostulated, at least temporarily, at the suggestion, and insisted on being a martyr. Not so Graves. His personal convenience really meant little to him, but he would allow nothing to swerve him from the job in hand. And he likewise refrained from any false humility in his thinking. It was his duty to save himself in every possible way in order to carry out the duty he was there to perform.

"It will be hard on you two, but it seems most sensible. Possibly, if they do plan to visit us, they'll catch up with us anyway."

"I don't imagine shooting, except as a last resort, will be their game, either," remarked Tex. "That would mean that the world would know you'd been murdered, and of course Daly and I would be included of necessity. Their plan would be a method of killing which could appear the result of the wreck. Which means we'll have an advantage if they do come. Well, I'll see if there's any food and water left from the emergency packets, and we can eat before we start the long trek."

Between the two ships he and Daly found a total of three sandwiches in a poor state of repair and one of the water bottles. They returned to Graves, and distributed the sandwiches. The rim of the sun, red as fire, just peeped over the riotous western horizon, forecasting the descent of the swift dusk which falls in the twinkle of an eye on the border.

"How do you suppose this gang knows you're here?" enquired Daly as he munched away on the soggy sandwich.

"There is but one logical reason," stated Graves. "Outside of army men and those actors and Crane I have met no one down here, and only absolutely trustworthy government agents know I am on the ground. Every officer of the border patrol knows my real identity, but not the men. Furthermore, the enlisted men were told that we were preparing for a test of what the patrol could do in an emergency, and unless there has been a leak which I can not believe possible there is no way that man at Sanderson who drained our gas could have any information except from the headquarters of his gang, so to speak. Who at headquarters has the fund of information?"

His brilliant eyes and broad-browed, almost ascetic face seemed to reflect the swift working of the mind within. Finally he said:

"Those actors were bona fide, and must be counted out. It is possible that some one recognized me on the train or in the hotel lobby—by the way, just what sort of a man is Crane? Can you add anything to your previous sketch of him, Daly?"

"Not much, sir. Politician, as I told you, and according to rumor made a fortune in grafting contracting in New York. All round sport, man-about-town, and that sort of thing. Owned a couple of horses at one time, and they won at widely spaced intervals and long prices, but you know how it is on the track. They will pull 'em and start 'em for funny reasons sometimes. His general reputation was a good fellow, one of the boys, you know; making money within the law but not always within the strict canons of the Methodist Episcopal Church."

Tex grinned at the words.

"The sheriff told me Crane was much interested in the border, but his proposed scheme of a high-class establishment for revelry on the Mexican side would account for that. When Trowbridge told me how he had been pumped, however, I sent a wire which will soon result in all the information available about Crane being in my hands."

Both Tex and Daly looked at Graves in surprize, and then their eyes met. Tex winked slightly, and a ghost of a smile played around Daly's rather thin lips for a moment. Graves was overlooking no bets, it seemed.

"Funny about smuggling—it always has appealed to otherwise honest people as legitimate," said Graves. "And prohibition has affected it to a vast extent. Few men who ever took a drink before prohibition could be found who have not been lawbreakers since. It's a situation unique in all history."

"Well, I guess we'd better be moseying," remarked Tex, getting to his feet awkwardly. A shooting pain went through his foot.

It was practically dark, and the air held a penetrating chill. A coyote yelped in the distance, and an answer came, long-drawn and weird.

"What about Sibley?" asked Daly. "I guess we'll just have to leave the poor kid until tomorrow, won't we?"

"I can't see anything else to do," MacDowell answered soberly. "We can't dig a grave, and there's nothing we could put over him that would keep the coyotes from him if they started."

It was left at that. The three were very quiet, thinking of the innocent youngster who had been the first sacrifice. In the Air Service the flyer who gets killed is considered one of the gang, who with open eyes flaunted fate and who can have no kick if he has to pay the price. It is tragic, but part of the game. A civilian or a mechanic, though, is subtly different. Flyers who have watched dozens of their mates crash to their deaths have quit the game when some bystander or passenger has met death before their eyes.

Tex had already spotted two slim mesquite logs which would do for stretcher rods, and he and Daly got them. The star-studded sky was like a soft canopy of purple velvet curving domelike above them, seemingly not far away. Pale moonlight illumined the whispering chaparral, and the noises of the night came in low rustles to their ears as they fashioned a stretcher with their leather coats.

They lifted Graves, whose face was convulsed with pain, to the improvised carrier, and the man sank back thankfully after the ordeal was over.

"Well, we're twenty miles from nowhere, cold and hungry and crippled and sore, but we're forewarned, have good evidence that our gentlemenly opponents are using airplanes, and there is the prospect of action immediately around a corner, so why should we kick?" asked Tex oratorically, as he bent to the stretcher. "Shall we ramble, Duke?"

The nickname, coming so naturally from the big flyer, fell pleasantly on Daly's ear, and there was a sudden sense of warm contentment within him. With every moment his regard and liking for MacDowell were increasing, and he did not blink the fact that the reckless Texan, with that subtle air of utter self-confidence and all-round capability, was a man whom he wanted to tie to.

As the curious trio wended their way ghost-like through the silvered wilderness Daly's mind flashed back to the great cities of the country, and with a laugh he visioned what the great world was doing now. The theater crowds of blazing Broadway and the Chicago Loop—the millions of tranquil homes—and here were they, fresh from the jaws of death, hiking slowly through the trackless mesquite to the accompaniment of coyote wails and rustling branches.

Thinking of his two companions, tinglingly conscious of where and what he was, Duke Daly, for the first time in his battered, lonely young life, was utterly contented and satisfied.

XI

FOR two hours, with Tex as pathfinder, the two flyers labored along with their burden. Tex was in constant pain, but he did not allow a hint of it to escape him. He could not refrain from limping a trifle, and he was conscious that Daly, in the rear, was taking more than his share of the weight. It was gall and wormwood to him to think of the slender Daly carrying more than his half of the load while he, with his superb body, played the weakling, but there was no help for it. Finally his foot seemed almost to lose the sense of feeling—it was simply a dull ache on the end of his leg. It had swollen somewhat, too.

There were frequent stops for a rest, when the three smoked and talked. What they had passed through, their isolation now in a wraithlike world which they seemed to inhabit alone, drew them all three closer together. It was difficult to remember that three days before they had not known each other; that Graves was old enough to be the father of both flyers, and that the lives of MacDowell and Daly had been as far apart as the poles.

During the aching torture of their progress through the mesquite Tex revived his drooping spirits with the possibility of action before the night was over. As he figured it, it was almost certain that in the big ring there were a considerable number of border outlaws, used for the actual work along the border itself. City men might take charge from the Rio Grande on to Chicago, but right along the river there was bound to be an outfit which knew the country. There would be men perfectly capable of riding to the scene of the wrecks, or indeed tracking the pedestrians. The more his brain played with the proposition, and the more he endeavored to put himself in the places of the outlaws, the more he believed that they would not be allowed to get to safety without interference.

"Anyway, that's what I'd do if I was in their places, which probably means it's exactly what they don't mean to do," he told himself, with the humorous mockery which was characteristic of his mental attitude.

Nevertheless as the little caravan plugged away through the scrubby growth, mostly in total silence, his trained ears were ever alert. In the intervals of rest the three talked the matter over thoroughly, and a tentative plan of action agreed on should certain eventualities occur.

For endless hours they stalked along, until three o'clock shone dimly from the illuminated hands of MacDowell's wrist watch. His actions were purely mechanical, now. Daly was silent as the grave, and Graves had apparently fallen into a troubled slumber. Not a word of complaint had passed the older man's lips, although a gray pallor had spread over his face long since.

Tex came to himself with a start at the menacing whir of a rattler. It struck at his boot.

"Keep the stretcher up—your boots'll be safe!" he said sharply as he felt the timbers heave in his hands.

In a moment the danger was passed. Daly had not faltered as they circled the snake.

Tex often afterward thought of that belligerent rattler with gratitude, for the indident had snatched him from what was almost a state of coma. For some two hours they had been on what was apparently a trail—a barely perceptible path. It led straight south, so they had followed it.

Now wide awake, Tex wondered how long he could plod on without calling for a rest to ease his foot. Suddenly he stopped, and the stretcher rods nearly tore from his hands as Daly's forward motion shoved them ahead. The slight shock awakened Graves.

"Listen!" commanded Tex in a low voice.

For a moment there was silence, broken only by slight rustling in the undergrowth. Then, carried plainly to them on the wings of the northern breeze came a man's voice, and the faint thud of horses' hooves.

Without a word being spoken they carried Graves into the undergrowth, and laid him facing the spot which they had just vacated. Colt in hand, Graves was ready, uncanny in his calm. Tex and Daly disposed themselves on either side, screened by clumps of trees.

The riders were evidently not seeking to make their progress secret. From their point of view, whatever their mission, there was no need of that.

A particularly loud voice, with a hint of thickness in it, carried some words to MacDowell's ears with startling accuracy.

"—believe they've found help!" said the voice.

For a moment nothing more, and then, in that same strident voice:

"Why couldn't it been *him* that shuffled off? I'm gettin' sick o' this ridin'——"

The Texan's heart leaped, half in excitement and half in simon pure delight.

Conversation ceased for a while, until the dull hoof beats seemed to be coming from a point only a few yards away. Three vague horsemen cantered into view, mysterious and menacing in the ghostly shadows.

"Maybe we ain't on their trail!" came a high, nasal voice.

"Oh, shut yore mouth!" returned the leader wearily.

They were riding in single file. Tex could see the face of the sombreroed leader, now. He was dressed like a border man, and below the shadow cast by his hat a thin gash-like mouth stood out like a scar.

Tex crouched closer behind the shielding clump of three close-growing trees and a spreading cactus plant. His Colt was cocked.

"Throw up your hands!" he shouted, his voice seeming to fill the silence like a thunderclap.

"Get 'em up!" yelled Daly from the other side, high above the astounded curses of the big fellow in the middle and the high-voiced little man who rode awkwardly in the rear.

Then the thin-faced border man did a brave thing, worthy of a better cause. Like a flash he wheeled his horse, and leaped straight for the unseen MacDowell.

Tex did not hesitate. The Colt spoke instantly, and the rider slid from his horse within five feet of him.

"Get 'em up!" rasped Daly again to the other two, who were cursing wildly and striving to subdue their plunging horses.

The riderless horse snorted, reared, and bolted. The other two mounts followed like sheep. The big man rode as though slightly familiar with his horse, but a little fellow was pulling leather. Tex leaped forward and lurched for the bridle rein, but his left foot went back on him. He half fell, and one of the flying hooves caught him in the right leg. He had a dim flash of a cruel, white face and burning black eyes above him.

"It's them— —— 'em!" came the rider's high-pitched cry to the man ahead.

Tex staggered to his feet as he heard galloping hoof beats returning. Daly sprang from his cover.

"Watch out!" called Graves sharply.

"Raney may talk, —— it!"

It was the strident yell of the big man in answer to the cry of the little fellow as they passed. The loud-voiced man had evidently gotten control of his horse again.

"They're waitin' for you!" screamed the little fellow in a diminishing wail as he was carried further away.

Like a thunderbolt horse and rider crashed into the trail and bore down on Tex and Daly. Bullets sang around them.

MacDowell's gun had been knocked from his hand by the impact of the horse he had attempted to stop, but the Colts of Daly and Graves spat fire together. The horse went to his knees and the big rider went catapulting over his head. He landed fifteen feet away at the base of a mesquite tree, and lay motionless, his body huddled in a grotesquely-twisted attitude.

While he was still in the air Tex was leaping forward, and flung himself on the man within a second after he had thudded to the ground.

"Get the other fellow!" he shouted breathlessly.

The warm body beneath him did not move. He turned it over. The big head flopped queerly. The man was stone dead, his neck broken.

The squeal of a horse in pain split the silence like some devil's voice. Tex got to his feet and limped painfully forward. The horse, after that one indication of pain lay quietly on its side.

"This bird's dead!" said Daly, straightening over the body beneath him.

"Lend me your gun and let's get this poor pony out of his misery," said Tex.

The horse lay in a widening pool of blood. In a moment the crack of the shot gave him surcease of pain.

"Both of them dead?" called Graves, as though making an inquiry about the weather.

"Yes, —— it! There goes our chance of making 'em talk. Did you hear what they were saying when they rode up?"

"I did," said Daly promptly.

"I heard enough," came Graves' meticulous words from the undergrowth.

"I'm glad you're along to explain this trail of dead men," remarked Tex. "Let's carry Mr. Graves forth from his leafy retreat, Duke."

When they had settled Graves, partly

upright against a tree, Tex dropped to the ground wearily.

"This calls for a cheroot," he stated easily, and rolled one absently.

"And likewise a rest until morning, or rather until dawn," put in Daly. "We can't be over five or ten miles from somewhere, are we?"

"About ten. We've made slow traveling. These birds as near as I can figure it, were going to either smite our domes and heave us in the wrecks or else kidnap us for a while. Notice how they didn't shoot at first?"

"They were playing to get rid of us one way or another," agreed Graves. "Well, gentlemen, you see what we're up against. Would you mind helping me over where I can get a look at these men?"

The man Tex had shot was dressed in the flannel shirt, overalls, and boots of the country. His clean, cruel face was wrinkled and weatherbeaten. The big man whose neck had been broken was ruddy-faced and sandy-haired, his fleshy face enfolding small, piglike eyes. Graves did not know either man, nor did Tex.

"This big boy met a peculiar death after having all those bullets flying around him," remarked Tex.

"I must have missed clean," admitted Daly. "I tried to drill him."

"I shot at the horse in an endeavor to get him alive," stated Graves.

"That was sure thinking ahead, sir," Tex said.

Graves took no notice of the compliment.

"I didn't have anything to do but think and watch you two fellows work," he said. "Things came out as you diagnosed them, Lieutenant MacDowell. I think Daly's suggestion about waiting for dawn a good one. I can get along all right, and you both need rest."

With those words he seemed to relax, and not another time did he refer to past happenings or future possibilities. It was too cold to sleep. The two flyers put on their leather coats, and until the eastern sky was graying with the onward march of the sun the three smoked and talked of many things. Daly and Tex swapped yarns—their lives had been curiously parallel in fundamentals, although entirely different in details. Graves threw in occasional sidelights from the view-point of a cosmopolitan man of the world to whom a dozen countries and a thousand celebrities were well known.

To Daly it was an entirely new and strangely enjoyable situation, and he was conscious of unaccustomed understanding and warm friendliness. It drew the two flyers closer together as it proved them spirits akin in many ways. Graves showed the more appealing side of his character—changed from a machine to an interesting man. It was particularly noticeable to Tex, who had no former conversations with the secret agent on anything aside from business.

Each of them, in his way, was an unusual man, and the conversation was made remarkable by the widely differing contributions each had to make to it. The setting lent it the last touch of the bizarre—wild loneliness and primitive desolation, with two dead men and a horse surrounding them and sneaking coyotes to lend a touch of life to a universe that seemed otherwise deserted.

XII

A FEW hours after the arrival of the three government men at Cindler a tall, heavy-set, slouching young man registered at the Laredo House, in Laredo, cast his rather close-set black eyes over the fly-specked register, and was assigned to a room. Shortly after he had dropped his grips he made his way to another room, knocked, and heard a throaty voice say:

"Come in!"

Mr. George D. Crane leaped to his feet and pumped the arm of the dark, heavy-faced stranger enthusiastically.

"Glad to see you, Charley boy!" he said several times.

The younger man, who seemed about thirty, was less expansive.

"What's going on?" he said in a heavy bass voice. "And for the love o' Mike, what's ailing you?"

Apparently Crane had been under a strain. His drooping jowls were looser and his face had lost its ruddy coloring. It was pasty and flaccid, and his small eyes were slightly sunken. As he extended a cigar to Reserve Lieutenant Charles Knugel his fat hand trembled. He lit his own perfecto, and snapped the match away impatiently.

"Charley, I learned something and I went crazy for a while. However, I guess it's all for the best, in a way. You don't know what it means when I tell you that a fellow named Graves is down here on the border. Six months ago he was pointed out to me by Jack Deelman as the government's ace—get me? Jack says: 'There's the only man they got can crab this scheme before the clean-up, if he gets wise to what's going on.' And Charley, Graves is on the border, togged out in uniform, calling himself Major Peabody and supposed to be in command of the McMullen flight of the border patrol. Get me? And a few days ago he started touring the border. What does that mean?"

The throaty voice was jerky and nervous, and Crane paced the small, shabby room nervously.

"Begin at the beginning," commanded Knugel.

His heavy body came to rest in a chair. He had a habit of tweeking the flaring nostrils of his large nose between two fingers, as though he realized it was overlarge and he was trying to thin it. His dark, heavy face, despite close shaving, showed steel-blue around the heavy jaws.

Crane sat down and gathered himself together. He told of the holdup, and of the rescue of himself and the actors by MacDowell and Trowbridge. Then of his meeting with Graves, and of what the little Jew in San Antonio had heard.

"Charley, I knew Graves was on the trail, see? Couldn't be nothing else, boy. And the —— of it was we hadn't got a man planted in every flight of the patrol yet—you know we were just planning to have a man enlist in every outfit to keep us posted! Well, I heard when I came down to McMullen as an invited guest, so to speak, that Graves and this MacDowell and Duke Daly——"

"Duke Daly? Not *the* Duke Daly?"

"Yeah. He's in the Air Service now. You never knew him, did you? He's had a wreck and they changed his face around with this new-fangled plastic surgery and he looks like a wide-eyed college kid that ain't dry behind the ears yet now. Well, with Daly and these actors and actorines there I was one of the gang, of course, and I'm sitting pretty with Graves and all of them. But I was telling you.

"Honest, Charley, when I heard about that trip along the border, right after the shock of seeing Graves here, I didn't know what the —— to do. I got seventy-two thousand in this deal already that I just got even on, and the big clean-up just starting. Of course, the thing to do was take cover for three months, if necessary, and not operate. But Charley, I've sunk all I had left after them —— ponies hit me, and Big Bill is broke. The stock market cleaned him for his wad last week!"

"The chief *broke?*"

The heavy Knugel was patently nonplussed at the news.

"Cleaned. Same old story. The keenest confidence man in the world'll play the ponies; the smartest trainer and good-thing man on the track'll buy mining stock; John D. Van Astorbilt'll go to a fair and fall for a gold brick or the shell game.

"Well, Big Bill being broke and me just even and with no profits yet for myself—all you boys have done the cashing in and got the velvet while I was getting my investment back— I *couldn't* lay off, Charley. With stuff worth half a million in this country on the way from Mexico City right this minute, and all that, I just had to figure to put over the big deal, see?

"But Charley I'm scared. I was worse scared at first. This Graves—he's worse because he looks so —— innocent, get me? Gray-headed, distinguished-looking egg, with one of those aristocratic faces. He might be some college president or some wealthy fellow with nothing to do but travel around and pay a hundred thousand for some old masterpiece or potter around in his books. Talks like it, too. But when you get a flash at him sometimes from the side he changes into a—a bird of prey, Charley! Knowing his reputation and all——

"Well, I went sort of crazy, I guess. We had Blinky Anderson planted at Sanderson, so I primed him. Couldn't do anything else, boy. He drained the gas out of their tanks, or most of it, so they both had to land out in the bushes. I figured they might be killed, but in case they didn't I sent Raney and Bell and Abe Gordon out where they lit, see? Corny Chisholm, in a plane, spotted the wrecks and of course Raney knows the country like a book. They were to croak 'em and throw 'em in the wrecks, see? Get rid of 'em without suspicion.

"Charley, I'm no murderer, and I'm telling you that now I kind of got hold of myself I—I'm sort of glad it didn't go through. They wrecked all right, but they say this Tex MacDowell is the best flyer on the border and I guess he is. The mechanic with Daly was killed, but the other three came out all right. But Charley, those three hombres are wise to something, because they knocked off Bell and Raney without warning. Abe Gordon was the only one got away. Blinkey could've, but Abe said when Raney was shot Bell went back to see he didn't or couldn't talk. Daly, MacDowell and Graves must know something, because they hid in the bushes and piled into our men right from the jump. Abe says that they were talking as they rode along, and maybe the three of 'em heard something.

"Graves is pretty badly hurt, they say, so he'll be out of the way. All we got to do is lay low until the big time, get away with that, and check out for a while."

Knugel had been listening closely, tweeking his massive nose and occasionally ruffling the coarse, wiry black hair that curled in oily profusion over his head.

"Not much use for me to go to McMullen then, is there John?" he asked at length in his rasping voice.

"Sure! Evidently MacDowell and Daly are helping Graves, ain't they? You don't know Duke Daly or MacDowell either. This Daly is one of the keenest, coldest propositions I ever saw. He can see the main chance a mile away. He was betting commissioner for the Clover Stable a while, and you know what that means.

"As for MacDowell—he's been the playboy o' the border ever since he's been here. You ought to've seen him when he tipped over that automobile and helped nab those crooks. He's a big, tawny devil like a—a tiger or something. When he was going over us to tip over that crook car, Charley, I'll swear he was grinning!"

"I heard about him some in France," admitted Knugel, taking a deep draw on his cigar. "He was with the British first and then the Americans. Was a prisoner in Germany a while."

"You got to keep an eye on Graves, if he's there, and these two, and everything else, Charley. We can't go wrong now!"

In some subtle way the beefy New Yorker seemed to have regained a portion of the look of prosperity and well-being which was usually apparent in him. His confidences to Knugel seemed to relieve his mind, as though he had shifted his burden on the other man as well as talked himself into a brighter view of things.

"And listen, Charley. No monkey business, boy. I've liked you ever since I picked you up there at Saratoga and made something out of you. Don't get messing around those dames too much and lay off liquor and tend to your knitting."

"That's all right, John," said Knugel sullenly.

"There's ten thousand apiece for the boys and a hundred thousand clean for the chief and me if nothing goes wrong. And nothing ought to. They haven't any idea about anything except that there's something up. They don't know who's in it or how we do it or anything like that. Young says there hasn't been a whisper down at Guaylia—everything's quiet and pretty. We'll watch close, say nothing, get the stuff over as soon's in and the next morning it'll be on its way. All the boys ready?"

Knugel nodded.

"Be in one at a time," he said.

"Nothing went wrong anywhere yet?"

"Not a thing," returned Knugel, pinching his nose and flicking some dust from his rather loud checked suit.

He was by way of being a nifty dresser if his clothes did announce themselves at a considerable distance.

"I made Chicago, St. Louis, Louisville and Memphis week before last——"

"And got drunk in Louisville and —— near——"

"Oh, lay off. It was just a little roadhouse party and there was no harm done. Everything quiet, and everybody satisfied. That was sure a keen stunt of yours, John—selling it that way. I'm not so strong for using boxes of candy as camouflage, on account of some of the customers not looking natural buying candy. But sticking the 'snow' in those ash-tray things and that stuff is class, John, class."

"I'll say it is," returned Crane expanding pleasantly under the younger man's praise.

There was affection in the deepset little eyes as they rested on the hulking young man to whom, for years, he had been almost a father. He had never quite comprehended the streak in him which had impelled him to pick up the young tout years before and befriend him.

The two men talked on through dinner of various matters. Crane had letters in his pocket from Mexican officials to prove that he was making overtures looking toward the founding of his amusement enterprise, and as he showed them to Knugel, and talked over the situation in more and more detail his self-satisfaction increased as his fear decreased.

The past few days had been a nightmare to Crane, and dimly he was realizing how far he had been taken along the road which he had begun to follow when it was a mere by-path, with no hint of what lay at the end of the trail. A product of the slums, he had grown up to become a political hanger-on, and then, through real native ability a power in the queer world that centers around Fourteenth Street in New York. For some years he had helped lap up the cream which fell to the faithful, and had indulged his childish desire for display, attaining the height of his ambition, which was a recognized place in the tinsel world above Fourteenth Street which centers in Times Square.

Then came prohibition, and the temptation of bootlegging. Having dangled for years on the fringe of camouflaged crime, he now plunged in further, although still working along lines which were considered anything but dishonorable by his friends. Of course, many of the thousands of respectable and upright men who were the final consumers of the liquor he handled might have held up their hands in horror at such plain breaking of the laws and statutes of the country.

Then the ponies finally ran off with most of his money. Playing the other man's game, and losing. It was Knugel, whose physical courage was undeniable, who came back from the war and in idle conversation suggested the idea of their present project. Big Bill Manners had been there, and Big Bill had money and nerve and no scruples.

Smuggling is one of those crimes which readily camouflage themselves as accomplishments. It is like a degenerate city gangster in a dinner coat handling a tea cup with éclat in a Park Avenue drawing room. Nothing in the idea repelled Crane, and his cunning brain saw its possibilities.

He was one of those men who, driven by fear, are temporarily transformed into beings whose hysterical panic drives them into far more terrible excesses than experienced criminals whose reactions to violence are weak, if any, and who are not to be upset by sudden emergencies. It is the difference between a snake and a cornered rat.

It was sheer panic which had caused that cold-blooded attempt to murder four men, and now that the brainstorm was over and he had argued himself into a feeling of temporary security, Crane was once more, at bottom as well as on the surface, a genial, often kind hearted, rather naively unscrupulous fellow who combined a resourceful brain and great executive ability with absolute inability to comprehend such matters as honor or respect for law in any aspects more subtle than cheating his best friend at cards or outright thievery.

Dinner being over, the strangely assorted pair hied them forth in search of wine, women and song. Wine they craved, women they would like, and song they could put up with.

XIII

IN THE late afternoon of the next day—Monday—it was warm enough for the McMullen flight to foregather on the veranda of the recreation building. Whenever possible, that location was infested with lounging flyers after the day's work was done. They dropped down there for casual conversation, lazy badinage, and what often amounted to an informal officers' meeting.

It had been one of those wonderful Winter days in Texas, when a man could have sat in front of his tent in pajamas without incurring the slightest danger of frost-bite. Eight young men in spotty khaki, their brown faces grimy with oil, were draped in attitudes of relaxation and ease along the railings, flat on the floor, or lolling on the steps.

"Peter, my lad, you look drawn and worn and weary with life," remarked Pop Cravath. "You don't appear to be up to your responsibilities as social factotum of the flight for the festivities of the evening."

Little Pete Miller twirled his microscopic mustache with fingers which performed the operation casually. It was plain that his heart was not in the gesture.

"I don't care if the shindig never comes off," he lied wearily. "Gents, I'm weary and burdened, and there is no savor in life. And if I, in all the glory of my youthful vigor, am fatigued, I don't see how a superannuated, bald-headed, paunchy old man of thirty like you, Pop, can even think of festivities."

In truth it had been a hard day. Since dawn, in regular two hour relays, the flight had gone out, one ship eastward to the Gulf and the other westward toward Laredo, on patrol. Even now Carson and Hickman were roaring along somewhere to the east on the last patrol, and Binder and Beaman were off over the mesquite to the west.

And all along the border the forces of the government were in full swing. Not an hour since dawn had passed that from ten thousand feet keen eyes had not swept the terrain below. On the ground Rangers and cavalry and customs men, unobtrusive, quiet, had gone into action. The business of building a human barrier along the twisting, turgid Rio Grande was under way, and the drag nets of the cooperating forces were seeking their prey.

"Tex and Graves and Daly ought to be booming in soon," remarked Captain Kennard, his eyes on the busy mechanics who were swarming over the row of De Havilands on the line, preparing them for tomorrow's work.

From behind the row of buildings, of which their recreation building was one, the *rat-aka-tat-tat* of machine guns reached their ears. The gunnery sergeant was testing some of the machine guns and C. C. gears which were installed on most of the ships, geared to shoot through the propeller.

"I'll be interested to hear all that happened," opined slim young Jimmy Jennings. "I'll bet it's plenty."

"Somebody said we were getting a reserve officer for a few weeks' instruction and duty," remarked Sleepy Spears.

Legend had it that the stocky, square-faced Spears awakened from his chronic condition of daylight somnolence when the sun so much as passed behind a cloud. Now, with relaxed body and half-shut eyes, one of which took on the appearance of a fighting souvenir by reason of a smudge of oil, he was apparently hesitating on the line between going to sleep and staying awake.

"Yes, name's Knugel," yawned Captain Kennard.

"Why in the name of all the minor prophets, captain, did you make us go out and do machine gun practice?" asked Pop Cravath plaintively. "It's bad enough when we aren't patroling so hard——"

The stocky, homely little captain ran his stubby fingers through the mouse-colored hair which stuck up on his head like the quills of a porcupine.

"Make sure the guns are working—and that you bozos can hit something," he told the adjutant.

It had been breathless work, as usual. The target a whitewashed circle on the ground, and the ships coming over five hundred feet high, dropping in rotation in a breathless nose dive, guns spouting fire and bullets through the propellor as the pilot aimed the nose of his ship at the target. Then a swoop out, barely scraping the ground, and a high zoom with the extra speed as the next bomber flashed down. And very, very few of the bursts ripped up any ground outside the circle.

"Oh, ——," remarked Jennings conversationally as he glanced at his wristwatch and shoved his Stetson further on the back of his curly head. "Nearly five, and the chill is on my liver and the frost is in my heart. Nearly time for dressing——"

"Here're some of the guests, but it is a cinch they haven't prepared yet for dinner. Too early," said Kennard cheerfully as cars turned in at the gate of the airdrome. "I'm quite looking forward to the events of the evening."

Mayor Edwards' limousine led, followed by the big touring car of a prominent McMullen real estate man. A small baggage truck holding one wardrobe trunk and two suitcases brought up the rear.

Jimmy Jennings looked fixedly at the first car.

"I know that fellow—I thought I recognized that name Knugel. Was with the 201st Squadron a while in France. Saw him in Paris a couple of times."

"I wonder how he got in with that gang?" asked the captain of all and sundry as the airmen arose to do the honors.

The cars were packed with the actors, Knugel, rotund Mayor Edwards and Bailey, the real estate man, who was a bachelor and was now really seeing life, with Merle Hopper and Elsie West crammed in the front seat with him.

"We've been seeing the country, and thought we'd drop out to see if the wanderin' boys had got back!" hailed the Honorable Samuel as the cars came to a standstill in front of the porch. "These actorines here can't be done nothin' with when it comes to divertin' conversation from the absentees."

The party flowed out of the cars, and

Knugel, in civilian clothes, saluted Captain Kennard.

"I'm Knugel, sir," he said in his heavy voice, his eyes taking a lightning-like view of the assembled flyers.

"Yes, I just got word from Washington this morning. You seem to know these people, so here's the flyers," and he introduced the new man. He recollected Jennings immediately.

The flyers appraised him with some interest—his position was slightly out of the ordinary. Each Summer reserve officers showed up at designated times to have two weeks training, but in Knugel's case evidently Washington had made a special provision, for it was unusual to have a reserve officer all by himself, and at any but the designated times.

"He's a friend o' Crane's, and looked up these folks, so we delivered him in style!" declared Edwards. "That's McMullen service for yuh! It ain't often the mayor himself——"

"I wonder how he'd have made out if he didn't have some good-looking girls to help inveigle the mayor?" ruminated Kennard aloud. "Knugel, you'll have tent eleven. I'll get the orderley to see that your trunk gets there all right."

"Yes, sir. Now if you'll all excuse me I'll find the tent and clean up a bit," said Knugel, and forthwith made off in the wake of his trunk, which was carried on the sturdy shoulders of two enlisted men for whom the captain shouted to the line.

"How about MacDowell and Daly and Major Peabody?" queried Henry Beckman as the visitors settled down on the steps.

"Started from Laredo nearly an hour ago—they'll be in soon," responded Kennard.

There was a hum of conversation and laughter. The actors and the flyers had hit it off capitally. Naturally some of the airmen, being hard-playing young men of active proclivities, had been doing some exploring along romantic lines, and had speedily found that the black-haired Miss White had a song-writer husband and a baby in New York to whom she was devoted, and that her lively blonde partner, Elsie West, also possessed a husband who was a popular juvenile at the Winter Garden that Winter. Merle Hopper, she of the vivid tresses and vivacious smile, had betrayed an intrest in Duke Daly, and all three were soon put down as nice people and good scouts, so on that basis the crowd had got together for some lively and enjoyable occasions.

Big blond George Hickman, now absent, had set sail for the Junoesque Miss Mary Francis, who assisted Joe Bernan in his act, using methods as subtle as he had against the opposing Harvard guard six years before. Inasmuch as Miss Francis was one of the people who devoured "The Sheik," he made some progress. The men were clean-cut chaps who hit it off with the flyers immediately. Their eager interest in all things pertaining to the air plus a humorous deprecation of their own city-bred ignorance had caused them to be voted O.K. by the flight, which was a tribute—to actors—from that gang.

The conversation turned to the recent accidents of Tex, Daly and Graves. If the flight had any suspicion that there had been foul play, they made no mention of it. The stage people were in absolute ignorance of the forces which were moving under their very eyes, and that for eight hundred miles men were devoting every minute of the day and night to the snaring of dangerous criminals.

"Here they come!" roared Mayor Edwards suddenly as his keen, puckered old eyes picked up a speck in the sky to the westward.

The visitors arose to look as Captain Kennard said—

"May be the patrol ship."

It was, and before it had landed the ship from the east roared over the airdrome. The sun flashed on what seemed to be a long wire trailing from behind one ship like a living sunbeam.

"That's the aerial for wireless," explained Pop Cravath, who was addicted to facts and not averse to displaying knowledge on any subject whatever, given half a chance. "There's a weight on the end of it to make it straight, and the keyboard and so forth is in the observer's cockpit. Very efficient wireless system."

He did not tell them that every ten minutes, from all sections of the border, wireless reports had been flashed to home stations, and relayed to McMullen for Graves' inspection, nor that at that precise moment a trusted sergeant, with ear-piece clasped to his head in the radio hut, was getting the last of the day's reports, relayed on from Laredo.

The two ships landed, and the oil-grimed flyers joined the groups on the steps. It was while Pop Cravath was still explaining to his interested listeners how the radio apparatus worked that Sleepy Spears cut in gently:

"Hush, papa. Here come the wandering sheep."

Two bombers, high against the setting sun, were dropping earthward in a long dive. Soon they were roaring around the airdrome, turning north for position to glide into the field over the northern boundary fence. The mechanics on the line ceased their trundling of the ships into the hangars, and stood ready to help guide the two ships in to the line. A plane is hard to handle accurately on the ground.

In a moment the ships had settled across the fence and landed cleanly on the hard-packed sand. The onlookers saw Tex and Daly lift a man from the rear seat of one plane and come down the line carrying him.

"That's G—Major Peabody," explained Kennard. "Tex wired that he had strained some ligaments and muscles pretty badly. Nothing serious, but he can't walk without a lot of pain."

The two flyers returned the chorus of greetings and carried Graves on to his tent. He was soon in bed and submitting to the ministrations of Major Searles, the flight surgeon. The major was an expert at assorted injuries, through his experience with doctoring flyers. A flyer can hit the ground in highly peculiar positions.

"As soon as you can decently get rid of the visitors, please bring me all reports and gather your crowd together here," ordered Graves.

In a short time he was sitting up in bed, having failed to refer to the accidents in any way whatever, and was busily perusing reports. There was something inexorable about the man, and the driving influence of the quiet, gray-haired, bedridden agent was felt immediately.

Tex and Daly told brief, mater-of-fact stories of the wrecks and their treks to civilization, with no mention of anything significant beneath the surface. The actors listened with consuming interest, as was natural. Graves had arranged for the temporary suppression of the fact that two men had been killed, and the flyers did not mention it. Sibley's body would arrive on the morrow.

In a short while the visitors departed for town to prepare for the evening, which was to include dinner with the squadron, the first show, and a dance afterward at the field to top off with.

The airmen gathered in Graves' tent.

The inside story of recent happenings was told them briefly, with a lack of emotion which was akin to their own attitude. Graves ordered that the news be flashed to the entire border that their prey was already cognizant of conditions and had begun to strike back.

Every pair of eyes was trained on the wan, machine-like figure in bed as Graves talked, and there was neither movement nor noise during the entire interview.

"It is a certainty that I have been recognized," Graves was saying evenly. "Consequently, these are the orders. The news will be spread that I am severely injured and absolutely incapacitated for any action whatever for weeks. I will, of course, be perfectly well within a few days, and as a matter of fact can handle all necessary details pending actual physical action. This news—that I am incapacitated—will prevent the culprits from running for cover immediately.

"As I gage the situation they have a tremendous investment in men and money, and two weeks respite from my heckling will cause them to carry on. Captain Kennard, kindly station a guard at my tent, and make additional arrangements whereby the entire field will be under impenetrable guard twenty-four hours a day. They may make additional efforts to finish the job they started on me. Any questions or suggestions, gentlemen?"

MacDowell's eyes met Daly's across the tiny tent, and Daly made a slight motion with his head to urge Tex to speak.

"Mr. Graves, there is a matter I have had in mind since Daly and I were told a while ago that a reserve officer named Knugel is going to be on duty with us for the next few months. He is here by obtaining a special dispensation from the War Department. He likewise claims to be an intimate friend of Crane's. At least, as soon as he hit town he sought out the show people and told them Crane had told him to look them up. In view of the slight amount of heavy wondering we did back there in the 'squite—" his mocking smile came to the fore as he recalled those hours—

"Wouldn't it be a wise thing for you to get some dope in Washington as to just how and through whom Knugel came down here?

"And just for safety's sake—mind you, I can't seriously think the coincidence of it all means anything—might it not be a good thing to see that Knugel doesn't know too much, and maybe to watch him closely? Daly knows him a trifle by reputation, and says that he and Crane were supposed to be intimates around the tracks. He and I talked the thing over as soon as we heard Knugel was here."

Could the wily Crane have heard the flyers' words he would have cursed his protégé in terms of less uncertainty than he ever had before. Knugel, through his incessant desire for wassail and display, had seriously crabbed the game when suspicious natures and keen minds like those of the three men against him were taken into consideration. The hulking New Yorker had looked forward to days with a group of actresses from New York as soon as he had learned from Crane that they were there. His first step had been to look them up, his next to claim their acquaintance by reason of his own friendship with Crane and his statement that Crane had told him to look them up and "show them a good time," as he expressed it.

Graves considered MacDowell's words for perhaps thirty seconds, which was a lengthy reflection for him, and then said:

"I think your suggestions are wise. Temporarily, use every effort to prevent Knugel from learning anything whatsoever of our plans or suspicions. You and Daly, or any of the rest of you who have a suitable opportunity, might question him a bit and report to me anything suspicious."

They scattered to dress for dinner, leaving lanky, lantern-jawed Sergeant Cary as tent guard. A few moments afterward Sheriff Trowbridge arrived. He was astride Aloysius V. Aspinwalling, which was one of the three horses in Hidalgo County capable of carrying the huge old man for forty miles without tiring. He was named after a tenderfoot from Boston who, ten years before, had shot the head off a ratlesnake which was coiled on the sheriff's blanket. This exhibition of marksmanship on the part of the original Aloysius V. had impressed Trowbridge profoundly, with the result that the name was perpetuated in Hidalgo County. In the case of both man and horse the name had been shortened to "Wally."

The sheriff heard Graves' terse story of what had happened, made his own report, and then ambled over to the recreation room, where the assembled guests were making merry before dinner. The busy sheriff had had no time to dress, so his usual raiment was in order.

Henry Beckman, who had been unanimously elected stage manager and chief impresario of the show to be given, promptly buttonholed the old man and led him to a corner, where Joe Bernan joined him in persuading the oldtimer to take part in the show that evening as announcer.

Meanwhile Knugel, in dinner coat and soft-bosomed silk shirt flashing with diamond studs, had been unobstrusively cut out of the herd by Tex MacDowell, assisted by Daly. Knugel, who had been disputing the attention of Mary Francis with George Hickman, perforce obeyed the invitation to have a drink, although it appeared that he had brought along some private stock. His dark face was flushed and the black eyes glittering, and his rasping voice was pitched in a loud key.

"Well, we seem to be quite a friendly gathering," remarked the Texan easily as he tossed off the aguadiente cocktail. "Here the Duke blows in and knows Crane and some of the actors, and then you come along and know Crane, and the sheriff and I horn in by accident."

"I tell you, when you've lived in the big town a while and stepped around a bit you can't go anywhere without bumping into some sport you know," said Knugel jovially. "How about another?"

"Sure, help yourself," Daly cut in. "Crane's a nice fellow, isn't he? I used to know him a little. Too bad he couldn't stay here at McMullen for a while. Where did you run into him?"

"Why—er—he dropped me a line when he heard I was coming here—" floundered Knugel, suddenly realizing the mistake he had made in the beginning. However, it didn't seem serious.

"I see. How did you happen to pick out McMullen for your reserve training? We're a long way from New York."

Knugel's black, close-set eyes darted from the lounging MacDowell to the handsome, quiet Daly. Both men were immaculate in well-fitting uniforms garnished with the silver wings of their service. Under MacDowell's insignia was a line of ribbons, souvenirs of appreciation from three governments. Both men looked guileless and seemed to be making friendly conversation.

"Well, you see I may go in with George on this amusement resort deal, doing some commercial flying carrying passengers. I wanted to look over the proposition and at the same time get my hand in again," he said somewhat uncomfortably. "So I knew he was down here and picked McMullen."

"Well, we're glad you did. Hope you enjoy yourself," drawled Tex. "There goes the bell, smitten as only the great and only Chink can do it."

As they filed to the dining-room, Tex, who was not needed as an escort, found time for two things. One was to grin with whole-souled enjoyment at the terrific vamping the dazed Major Searles was getting from the fifty-year old lady who had the trained dog, and the other was to reflect:

"It's been only a few days since this gang got started toward McMullen. Now I wonder how in —— Knugel knew they were here? He must have been on the train for at least three days—said he came from New York——"

He looked for Daly, but Merle Hopper had him corraled. Tex had frequently noticed how Daly seemed to have withdrawn into himself again as soon as he had found himself in the crowd. He had that indefinable air of aloof reserve about him, entirely different from the eager comradeship which had gradually grown more obvious out there in the mesquite and during other hours when the two had been by themselves. Although he was courteous, poised, and entirely at his ease, Daly seemed during dinner to be so indifferent as to almost appear bored.

From glimpses he had had into the young flyer's past experiences, Tex thought he could explain him somewhat. As always, MacDowell was aware of a distinct liking for Daly which, through their recent experiences had grown into something more than that. And he was interested, which, after all, has a great deal to do with a fifty-fifty friendship.

Knugel was persistently seeking to dominate the conversation. His loud voice periodically hushed the table as he rambled on with reminiscences of New York's bohemian world. It was easy to see that he was striving to impress all and sundry with his status as a man of the world. The actors, to whom all that was an old story, would much rather have listened to the chuckling badinage of Trowbridge and Mayor Edwards, for instance, or the casual repartee indulged in by the flyers, or even the humorous compliments of Pete Miller and George Hickman and Pop Cravath.

Pop's romantic yearnings had neither been assuaged nor dampened by having wooed, won, married and divorced a certain well-known singer in the total elapsed time of four months, and he was an experienced and versatile handler of conversation. Tex watched Knugel, once in a while took the conversational lead with softly slurred, humorous words which took the edge off some of Knugel's less tasteful remarks, and at intervals retired into reflection on the happenings of the past few days and possibilities for the future. He was having a fine time, but what lay ahead loomed brighter and more interesting.

Came the show, for which the Southern Theatre had been requisitioned. It had a thousand seats, and standing-room was at a premium. It was the contrast of the border, incarnate, that audience. There were a half-dozen evening gowns that had been bought in Paris by those who wore them, and dozens of riders from outlying ranches in boots and soft shirts. Mayor Edwards, with the combined aid of wife, niece and two servants, had been hammered, pulled, pushed and bullied into full dress, although most of his friends of the olden days were present in their usual flannel-shirt regalia. They wouldn't put on a white collar for anybody.

Sheriff Trowbridge was announcer, and no comedian whose name was in lights on Broadway that evening could have filled the particular job so well. Caryce Delmar worked her dog and tried to sing, Joe Bernan and his partner tied the show in a knot with their domestic quarrel skit, the acrobats took four legitimate bows for the first time in their lives, Merle Hopper and her partner tossed flip wise-cracks back and sang the blues. Then came West and White to knock the customers off their seats with a series of dances that required progressively minute costumes. The applause, led by the married men who were bosses in their own homes, lasted four minutes. Henry Beckman left them cheering rabidly for more after he showed them the best legmania dancing on the big time, which closed the show in a burst of glory.

An hour later fully half the people in the audience were dancing on their own hook in the great disused hangar, heated by red-hot stoves, which housed the social events sponsored by the flight. It was decorated in keeping with the location, even to cooling breezes generated by propellers on airplanes, guarded from unwary dancers by secure screening.

It was along about two in the morning when Tex, having done his dancing duty, slipped out to smoke a tranquil cigaret. He was not particularly fond of social divertisment of that nature, and was glad to drag in deep lungfuls of crisp air under the low-hanging purple sky.

He strolled up the line of hangars, past the parked automobiles which seemed to half-fill the airdrome. He was going to go over to Graves' tent. Daly was there. He had elected to pass up the show on this particular evening—it was to be given three nights—and stay with Graves, both as a pleasure and as a guard. He had dropped over for a few dances, but had returned.

Tex turned and lounged slowly past the enlisted men's barracks, headquarters and messhall until he was abreast of the recreation buildings. He caught a gleam of white, and then his eyes picked up two tall figures, one that of a woman.

He averted his eyes and increased his pace. Suddenly there was a slight scuffling and he could hear the unmistakable tones of Knugel saying something breathlessly.

Knugel had been drinking heavily, Tex knew, since the ending of the show, and as he saw that the woman was trying to fight herself free from the man's arms he decided to take a hand. It was the flirtatious Mary Francis, but she was a guest of the flight—

"Better let her go, Knugel," he said slowly, his words carrying clearly.

Knugel released the girl, who gave a gasp that sounded like a half-sob. The man came to the end of the porch, peering at the flyer.

"I'll thank you to mind your own business, lieutenant!" he sneered.

"That has its points, too," came MacDowell's words, slower than usual. "But these folks are our guests, you know. You've been drinking quite a bit——"

"Well, what's that to you, you —— ——"

Still Tex was patient.

"There's a lady around, Knugel," he remarked softly. "Shall I take you back to the dance, Miss Francis? I——"

"Didn't I tell you to butt out, you —— —— ——"

The vile epithet decided Tex. In one bound he was up the steps and had sent Knugel's hulking form sprawling down them to the ground. There was a suppressed scream from the actress, who shrank back against the wall.

Knugel rose to his feet and attacked the waiting flyer without hesitation. Cowardice was not one of Knugel's weaknesses. And furthermore, he was no amateur with his hands.

Tex avoided the first wild rush easily, getting in a left jab to the ear as he stepped sideward that staggered Knugel. He came in more carefully then, and for a minute there was a rapid-fire exhibition of boxing in the pale moonlight that was pretty to watch.

Then science was forgotten by the raging New Yorker as he saw that he was not reaching Tex and realized that his own prominent nose was spewing blood. He staggered the flyer with a wild swing that caught him in the neck, and the next second had leaped on him, bearing him to earth with a crash that for a moment left the Texan weak and breathless.

Groping fingers around his throat stung him into action after a few seconds of utter quiescence. Above him Knugel's flushed, contorted face was twisted and strained, and the cords stood out on his beefy neck.

MacDowell's six feet two of lean muscle stood him in good stead. He went into action like a flash, and for a moment was a twisting straining, fighting wildcat. With feet and arms and body he used the last atoms of strength in his big body.

Finally he twisted loose, and Knugel's body was sent rolling five feet to one side. Tex came to his feet, breathing hard, his uniform a wreck and this thick brown hair in disarray above flaming eyes that somehow did not reflect hate or even anger, but a fierce delight.

He took the aggressive as Knugel staggered up from the ground, and crashing blows thudded one-two to the reserve officer's body. By hard experience Tex knew that the body is the vulnerable point in all opponents, save possibly some professionals.

Men whose faces can take punishment crumple at blows to the stomach and solar plexus.

Knugel was nearly out, but with commendable courage he made a last attempt. He took a terrible blow to the jaw as he leaped in, his very useful right coming over with all the strength of his powerful shoulders behind it. MacDowell's guard was not up quite in time, and the ham-like fist, now bleeding and raw, was merely diverted slightly until it found its mark on the cheek.

Tex gave ground with a short left to the head. As Knugel, half-staggering, bored in to press his advantage MacDowell swayed from the hips and his sledge-hammer left buried itself in Knugel's flabby midriff. Knugel staggered, and quick as a cat the Texan's right swing caught him on the button. He fell backward and as he fell his head hit the bottom step. He lay motionless.

On the top step Mary Francis, hand to her mouth as though about to scream, stood as motionless as the body of Knugel lay below. The throb and pulse of the music, undertoned by shuffling feet and shot through with light laughter came to the gasping flyer and the girl.

"I—I'll get some water," panted Tex. "That was—what I call a *soirée*. Who'd have thought he could do it?"

Miss Francis sank to the step and hid her face in her hands. When Tex returned with a bucket of water she was leaning over Knugel.

"I'll tend to him," she said abruptly.

"Good."

Tex set the bucket down, and as he did so a sheet of paper which had apparently fallen from the unconscious man's pocket caught his eye. He picked it up—it was a telegraph blank.

In a split-second his faint suspicions of Knugel crossed his mind. He turned from the girl and opened the folded blank swiftly. In the dim light it was hard to see the words, but as he bent over it he could read:

CHARLES KNUGEL,
203 DRAYTON AVENUE
LITTLE ROCK, ARK.
MEET ME LAREDO HOUSE SATURDAY.—C.

"I guess this belongs to him," he said to Miss Francis, who was soaking a ridiculous handkerchief in the water. "You might tell him when he comes to that I won't mention anything to anybody about this."

"I will," said the chastened Miss Francis.

The big airman grinned down at her through puffed lips. He had watched the striking young woman at intervals during the evenings festivities, and he knew her type.

"I'm sorry he felt called on to use some pet names, Miss Francis, and that this little tea party had to be staged. Some day you teasers will learn that if you play with fire you're going to get burnt."

He strolled off toward the tents, believing it wiser to be among those absent when Knugel came to. The events of the last few minutes, which had caused his utterly disheveled appearance, passed from his mind as completely as though they had never happened as his mind became busy with that telegram which had come so fortuitously to his hand.

Graves stared from his pillow as the battered flyer entered the tent, and Daly leaped to his feet.

"What the ——" he began eagerly, but Tex interrupted him with a wave of his hand.

"Had a scrap with Knugel," he explained with a lopsided grin.

He told them the story briefly, and then turned to the telegram.

"C might be Crane, and it was sent to a Little Rock address when Knugel said he came from New York," he reminded them.

Daly's eyes blazed suddenly, and Graves tapped the blanket with a long, well-manicured forefinger.

"It may not mean anything, but the chances are it means we have been and are on the right track," he said evenly, in his business voice. "Daly has told me of what your conversation before dinner brought forth. Somewhere in every undertaking of a criminal character there is a slip—either in the planning or the execution. It may have come in this man Knugel. At any event, I'll add a wire to Washington to this heap and find out just how he comes to be here."

In silence he reached for pad and pencil and wrote a message to add to the small stack on a table alongside the bed. The little oil-stove whispered away in the small tent as Graves' pencil traveled swiftly over the paper.

In a few minutes they forgot their mutual undertaking, and chatted idly for an hour in close, understanding comradeship which was odd in three so widely divergent men. If Graves was at all bored by talking to the two younger men he did not show it. Perhaps it was his pleasure to pass on to them some of the things he knew, and to contribute from his own richly varied life some of its lessons.

Finally the two flyers rose to go.

"It's after three!" said Daly in surprise.

"So it is, and at five-thirty I rise to take the first patrol east," yawned Tex. "Then you agree that Sleepy Spears is the man to keep an eye on Knugel and all his works, sir?"

"I'll take your recommendation of him," smiled Graves. "Good-night, fellows."

In one of the tents which they passed on their way to their own Knugel was stung into another attack of raging fury and humiliation as he heard Daly's low laugh and MacDowell's drawl. The big New Yorker was tasting the dregs, then. Moved by some obscure impulse, Mary Francis had told him of MacDowell's reading of that telegram.

To add to the hatred which had been born of his humiliation by MacDowell there was another thought as bitter: by his own foolishness he had perhaps spoiled his chance for usefulness at McMullen. More than that, there was a tiny, menacing suspicion that the successful culmination of the whole gigantic enterprise might be affected by the clues he in his carelessness had put in the enemy's hands, although that non-committal telegram seemed a tiny foundation for suspicion.

He was still awake when, in the misty chill of the dawn two De Havilands roared away from the field to join the aerial rangers who were sweeping the Rio Grande country, watching like hawks to pounce on their prey.

XIV

FOUR days later the first tangible clue was caught in the eight-hundred-mile drag net spread along the border.

The quiet work of the cooperating agencies had resulted in many minor captures, of course. There were a few small fry, bootleggers and rustlers, who were unfortunate enough to be picked up as side-issues to the greater objective, but they meant nothing to the men who were after bigger game. Graves, like some suave spider at one corner of a huge net with edges anchored in Washington, Chicago and El Paso, stayed in his tent and received the fruit of the work of hundreds of men in dozens of places, and saw unrolling before his eyes the progress of the hunt. Tex and Daly, for two hours each day, had the privilege of getting a glimpse at the forces of the law in action. Graves was inexorably driving his huge organization toward its goal.

As yet there was nothing definite unearthed about aerial transportation of the contraband, but as Daly pointed out, shrewd criminals, by changing landing fields every trip, could easily keep the land-bound observers guessing for a long time.

"They could land, unload, and be on their way before any possible report could reach headquarters, much less any men be on the ground," he stated, and Tex and Graves were forced to agree.

The report on Crane and Knugel from Washington strengthened Graves and the flyers in their almost instinctive convictions regarding the two New Yorkers. The obscure office-holder whose services had been enlisted had once been in the same political organization in New York City as Crane, and Crane's reputation was very shady, albeit he had never been in the clutches of the law.

From Little Rock came the word that Knugel had been located there for nearly three months, his business stated to be commercial traveler, and that he was frequently out of town for days at a time. He had been known to be greatly interested in aviation.

The agents had been, to all practical purposes, unsuccessful in gaining any new information about the traffic in the various cities under surveillance. Their present orders were to gather data and not to strike until the word went out.

Knugel, watched incessantly by the somnolent, lazy Sleepy Spears, he who could throw off his languor and get into action so quickly and so terrifically when necessary, had made no false moves. He had been going to town regularly in the evening and finally Spears, armed with suitable authority, got a look at a letter he had mailed. It was addressed to Crane at Laredo, with the note:

"PLEASE FORWARD."

Ayers of the Texas Rangers reported that Crane had left Laredo for parts unknown, apparently, and had left no forwarding address. He also reported that at Guaylia, a little settlement less than a hundred miles from McMullen and not far from Laredo, were the only strangers in the country; a little Jew by the name of Abram Gordon and another man named Young. The two had bought a small place some months before, about four miles from Guaylia, and had been living there since, hiring a man named Barney to do their work for them. There seemed nothing suspicious about them—they farmed in a small way and had stated they had come to Texas for their health.

These things, and many other extraneous items of information had not been combed from the depths without cost. Billy Farnum and Jim Tuttle, flying out of Marfa, had crashed to earth in a canyon between there and El Paso. Tuttle escaped with a broken arm, and there was just a chance that Farnum may not have to lie flat on his back for the rest of his life with a broken spine. In Chattanooga an investigating agent was shot dead, and one Ranger had been missing for three days without a clue as to why he had disappeared, or where he was.

It was the same morning which marked the arrival of information concerning Knugel's activities in Little Rock that Don Goodhue and his observer, Boyle, were flying in the vicinity of Guaylia on the third patrol of the day and saw a ship on the ground—not a DeHaviland. Mindful of their instructions, Boyle seized the key and word was flashed to Laredo of the discovery. Within the next few minutes Sergeant Brower at McMullen was taking the delayed message down, and twenty minutes from the time the ship had been spotted the news was in Graves' hand, together with an accurate description of the location.

Five minutes thereafter Tex and Daly were hurrying for the tent—Tex from the hangars where he had been supervising the work of the Engineering Department and Daly from the recreation room, where he had been looking over two or three books which had come for him in the morning's mail.

Graves was striding unhurriedly up and down the tiny tent. He was practically well, now, although word had gone out that he was in bad shape. For Knugel's benefit, the secret agent never left his tent except in the evening, when Knugel was always lying around with the actors, who were by now the social lions of the town.

With a quick gesture Graves indicated the message, and the airmen, bent over it together, took it in quickly.

"Now the question is this: would a quick raid, without further information or investigation, have a good chance of unearthing something valuable?" said Graves thoughtfully. "Or is there a good chance that no raid could be made without warning enough so that it would be abortive? I believe the headquarters of the gang may be right at this point, or rather that it is the shipping point, so to speak. Chances are that there would be little if anything definitely incriminating right there, and that a round-up might be premature——"

He broke off, and somehow Tex thought he could almost see the brain behind that broad brow flowing evenly along, examining every aspect of the problem.

"Listen, Mr. Graves, how would this be?" he asked, his eyes alight. "Why not let Duke and me in a ship have a forced landing there? We could do it close to nightfall, so we'd almost have to spend the night. Chances are a hundred to one—a thousand to one, that we could get away with a story that we are from Sanderson or somewhere.

"Nobody would know us by sight, even if Daly and I are connected up with you in any way except the accident of being your escort along the border a few days ago. We can size up the situation and maybe get some dope on whether a raid would be worth anything, or merely scare 'em so that they'd take cover and crab the whole game. And then you know there may not be a —— thing in any of it—just a strange ship landing there."

Daly's eyes glowed at the prospect.

"That strikes me as pretty good," he stated.

Graves smiled briefly.

"I'd expected the idea to appeal to you fellows," he remarked cryptically. "Suppose we wait a while and see whether there is anything further."

Acting on orders not to scare prospective victims any more than necessary, Goodhue and Boyle did not continue their survey for so long as to be suspicious. The next patrol reported no ship in sight.

"They mention a big shed," Graves said. "The ship may be in there, or it may have moved on. I've been thinking the matter over, and I am going to adopt your plan, MacDowell. I myself will go to Laredo, which is much nearer Guaylia, to be on the ground. I'll get somebody to fly me there, and see that I get away without my departure being known, and also arrange with Captain Kennard, for Knugel's benefit, that everything shall go on as though I was still in my tent, suffering a relapse."

For an hour they discussed the details, and before noon everything was arranged. Tex and Daly, during the afternoon, indulged in considerable further conversation regarding the possibly interesting prospect before them.

"Crane is in Laredo, but Graves can hole up out at the field without Crane's knowing it," Tex pointed out in answer to Daly's suggestion that Graves' presence might complicate matters. "We'll be able to look over that deserted spot down there, see who's around, and whether they are really doing anything to excuse their presence."

They avoided Knugel, which was no hard task, for since the fight the big reserveman had not exchanged a word with the Texan, and had likewise avoided Daly, for by now the two were almost inseparable. Daly was friendly with all the flyers, but it was merely a pleasant surface intimacy. He felt more at home with them already than had been the case with any group he had ever known. The smallness of the outfit made close association a necessity, and there was a frank friendliness about them that he appreciated. They considered that he had won his spurs on that border flight, and his reserve won him additional respect. He was one of them.

He discounted his relationship to the actors; reducing their liking to the remnants of the respect they would have had for him as man on the "inside" of the sporting world, and never considering that there was anything personal in their persistent desire to seek him out.

With Tex, however, it was entirely different. There were long, rambling talks together—the sort that mean nothing in themselves and yet have undercurrents that mean everything. With Graves he had nothing really in common, even although the older man's casual association did mean a great deal to him. It was the case of the old college professor over again. With Tex the association was as close and significant, with the added factors of a community of interest, and youth.

It was characteristic of him that he shoud deliberately seek to eliminate the big Texan as a friend, if he was to be brushed aside by knowing the real Daly. Where the ordinary person would have striven to hide anything that might cause the foundation of friendship to crumble, Daly, during the hours of waiting for their departure, deliberately flaunted the black spot in his career before Tex—and found the first friend he had ever known.

Daly had been talking idly of the marvel of modern life as it impressed his innately sensitive spirit; how the simplest of things, like a dish, had behind it the wonders of modern transportation, of great factories, of sweating men wringing raw material from forest and mine. To him the simplest of things indicated the sum of all human ingenuity.

"I get you," nodded Tex, whose big body was stretched across the cot in cat-like ease, "although I never thought of it in that way."

His eyes swept the face of his companion, in persistent curiosity.

"How did you happen to get thinking along the lines you do?" he asked abruptly. "You're rather different from what one would expect from a race-track man, and so forth."

Daly told his story quietly, unsparing of himself, and even exaggerating the darker chapters as though turning the knife in the wound. With a sort of cynical perverseness he sought to test to the limit the real quality of the frienship he desired so strongly.

"I probably should have gone to work for fifteen a week, or starved in a garret, or something like that, but I didn't," he concluded. "Furthermore, I'm not really ashamed of it—any of it. It was a phase, if you like—it came about through circumstances, took place, passed on, and is now as though it never happened so far as I am concerned. The day I ceased to be a professional card shark was the last day I ever won a crooked nickel. Maybe I'm lacking somewhere, but what I was I was, and people can take me or leave me, as they see fit. I can get along without them—I always have, with the exception of my card partner. And he, like Lightning-foot Dawson, cost me money."

Tex had listened quietly. He glanced at his wristwatch, and arose negligently. For a moment his eyes met Daly's.

"Few men are qualified to sit on a jury, unless they've been a thousand miles from home, broke and hungry, or been double-crossed for their last dime, I guess," he drawled. "I ran away from home myself and had some lean weeks. Let's forget it. It's time we started. There goes Pete and Graves now."

His gray eyes were warm as he smiled and led the way out. Of such stuff is men's friendship made.

XV

AN HOUR later Tex, who was flying the ship from the front cockpit, oriented himself exactly and prepared to catch Guaylia when it should come underneath them. It was a tiny settlement, and it would be an easy matter to get hopelessly confused in looking for it. It was within a mile of the Rio Grande, and their immediate objective, according to Boyle's description, was about four miles west and right on the river.

It was late afternoon, and the sun was half concealed by the horizon when MacDowell picked up the collection of buildings which he took to be Guaylia. He shook the stick, turned to Daly, and pointed to the earth, three thousand feet below. Daly nodded, and commenced to keep a close watch on the ground.

In three minutes MacDowell's judgment was vindicated. Below there was a string of fields, one of them a large one, although from the air it seemed small. Flanking it in the westward side was a big shed, and further toward the river a house. The field was separated from the river on its southern edge by a fringe of mesquite along the banks. The house was within two hundred yards of the watery boundary between Mexico and the United States.

Daly got busy in the back seat. He pulled the spark lever back to full retard, and also opened the altitude adjustment, which governs the carbureter mixture. Having thus arranged for a popping and missing of the motor, he added to the effect by jazzing the throttle. The big Liberty commenced making a noise like a crippled motor.

Tex came down in sweeping spirals while Daly saw to it that the nearer the earth they got the more the motor spit and missed. To carry out the pretense, MacDowell planned to land without loss of time—it would be strictly unnatural for a ship with a motor spitting like theirs to attempt to look over the field more closely.

They saw an eruption of men from the house—six of them, Daly counted. Tex decided to land over the fence which was the northern boundary of the field. It was a stubble-field, apparently, and practically level. From the air there were several tracks across it that looked as though they might have been made by a tailskid. They did not have the double-spacing of wheel tracks.

MacDowell, with instinctive judgment was straightened for the landing three hundred yards back of the field and three hundred feet high. The missing motor, working erratically, was cut to idling as the bomber settled across the fence and came to earth. It rolled along with diminishing speed, stopping opposite the house and beyond the shed.

"Keep her missing while I taxi," MacDowell flung over his shoulder, and proceeded to trundle closer to the house to the accompaniment of loud pops and irregularly firing cylinders.

There were only three men in sight as he turned off the gas and then, when the motor had run itself out of gas, clicked the switch levers closed.

They climbed out and a tall, thin, dark young man in blue trousers, flannel shirt and a cap led his companions toward the ship.

"Don't mind if we use your pasture, do you?" grinned MacDowell easily. "Our motor has struck for the day, I guess."

"Not a'tall," said the thin man, who had a long, humorously curved nose and a narrow chin. His eyes were small and bright as shoe buttons. "Army ship, I suppose."

"Yes," answered Daly. "We're from Sanderson—been down to McMullen and was figuring to make Laredo before dark. Lucky we were over a field like this. My name's Gray, and this is Peters," he went on, thrusting out his hand.

"Glad to know you—Gary is my title, and this is Barney and Todd. And here comes Abe Goodman."

Barney was apparently a Texan. He wore a sombrero and overalls along with flannel shirt and loose black tie. Todd was a stocky, square-faced young man, rather hard-looking, but genial enough. Goodman, who came up, was undersized and dark, with rather fine dark eyes but a cruel mouth.

"Whose place are we on?" asked Tex as he rolled a cigaret and offered the makings around.

"Don't belong to none of us," said Goodman in a high, nasal voice that made both flyers repress a start of recognition.

It was the voice of the awkward little rider who had been with the ill-fated expedition into the mesquite which had resulted in his companions getting killed.

"We come from Chicago," Goodman went on, "An' we rented this place here for a couple o' months. We're thinking maybe we might settle down here and we're huntin' and looking around and Barney here is kind of a guide for us."

MacDowell's mind was working swiftly. It was certain that this was the rendezvous of the border section of the gang. However, it was growing dark, and it would be both dangerous and hard to explain if they should attempt to fix the ship now and get away immediately. Goodman did not recognize them, he was sure. There was no way he could have seen their faces out there in the mesquite. And by staying overnight no telling what information could be picked up.

"Well, I guess we're stuck for the night," he drawled gently. "Could you fellows part with a snack of food and maybe give us a shakedown for the night?"

Goodman, who seemed to be the leader, hesitated and his eyes wavered to the faces of his companions.

"Why, sure. Think you can fix your ship all right?"

"I think so—I believe it's in the carbureter. It'll be dark before we could get started on it tonight, though," said Daly. "I——"

For just a second he stopped as though paralyzed, his eyes on a stocky figure which was limping along toward the group. Crooked leg, black mustache, familiar cap—it was Young, his companion during those months in San Antonio years before.

"I don't believe it will be wise to try to fix it until tomorrow, do you?" he went on steadily, turning to Tex.

His mind was working like lightning as MacDowell's words fell on his ears without making any sense. It had been eight years ago that he had been Young's right bower, and that change in his face——

As the cripple approached the group there came a faraway drone that caused all conversation to cease. It seemed that the De Haviland approaching was as much of a surprise to their hosts as to the two flyers. Daly was ever conscious of Young's steady regard. No one thought to perform any introductions, for there was uneasiness in both camps.

It was nearly dark, and the exhausts of the ship above were sending streamers of crimson against the sky. The motor's roar decreased, and the ship began to spiral down.

"Must be he saw our ship," said Tex easily, masking the disquiet within him successfully.

What was another border ship doing out that late? If it was a purposeful landing, what could that mean? Was it Graves? Whoever it was would very probably spill the beans. His eyes sought Daly's face, and saw him looking surreptitiously at the cripple, who was now the center of an uneasy knot of men.

The De Haviland landed and came trundling through the shadow. Both flyers yielded to the unknown pilot a tribute for his skill in making the difficult landing.

The ship taxied to the waiting group and drew up alongside the other ship. There was but one man in it, and Tex drew in his breath involuntarily.

It was Knugel.

Subconsciously MacDowell's hand crept toward his Colt, and Daly drifted over closer to him, ready.

Knugel shut off the motor and hurried toward them. His head was bent forward in his straining effort to see who the uniformed men were. Tex thought he detected a slight movement of caution to the civilians.

"Oh, it's you is it MacDowell?" barked Knugel. "And Daly. What are you doing here?"

The hatred of the man for MacDowell, as well as fear and suspicion, all showed in that half-sneering, half dictatorial question.

"MacDowell and Daly!" whined Goodman, his voice breaking ludicrously.

The group stepped a trifle closer, and in every line of their bodies there was deadly menace.

"They told us their names was——"

"Yes, we gave assumed names," broke in MacDowell with such slow gentleness that Daly, for a second, found it hard to realize the position they were in. "And I'll tell you the reason, now that we know where we are. We've found out—or mostly I have found out—that there's somebody along the border out to get me. —— near did it, and others with me, a few days ago. It's probably an outgrowth of my old feud with Dave Fitzpatrick. There's a lot of men of his got hurt in that deal, and they want revenge, I guess. If any of you are border men you'll know what I mean. Anyway, I find it wise, until I know I'm among friends, not to let on just where I am. See? How did you happen along here, Knugel?"

"I was just flying around and forgot how late it was and how sudden the darkness falls in this country," rasped Knugel, his eyes flicking suspiciously from Daly's face to MacDowell's. "When I came to it was too late to get back to McMullen——"

"I see. We'd better get word to Laredo and McMullen right quick. Laredo's where we were bound. Both places'll want to know where we are."

He found time to wonder at the meaning of the huge grin on the cripple's face. Daly knew what it meant all too well. He braced himself for the recognition, but for some reason Young saw fit to hold his tongue. The mention of the name Daly had completed the identification of the flyer with the old-time partner.

"One o' the boys are going to town right away," said Goodman. "He'll get your messages off all right."

Still that air of deadly quiet. Tex felt like a man in the midst of a dark cave, with unknown terrors about to leap from the shadow at any moment. And his eyes glowed and flamed as he lounged easily against the fuselage, with Daly next him and their opponents in a close ring around them.

Knugel's visit was not accidental, of course. Perhaps he had learned in some way that Daly and himself were bound for the rendezvous.

Young's unctious chuckle came in well-remembered gurgles to the Duke's ears. It eased the tension of those quiet, menacing forms and peering eyes.

"Let's get all the Lieutenants fixed up, and then I want to confab a minute with you fellows—somethin' just come up," he said.

There was a moment of hesitancy, and then the cavalcade moved toward the house. While the rest waited on the veranda Young and Goodman went in and lighted lamps and candles. From upstairs there was a gleam of light through a drawn window-shade.

"Well, let's proceed," said the tall, long-nosed young fellow who had been the first to meet them.

Young set a candle in an old-fashioned bathroom located underneath the stairs.

"You can clean up in here," he told them, avoiding Daly's eyes but grinning widely as though in appreciation of an excellent joke. "Then you can go in the kitchen and keep warm with Barney while he's cookin'."

Tex noticed that the kitchen, which was at the end of the short hall, commanded a view of the bath-room door, and that the mahagony-faced Barney was armed with a six-shooter.

Knugel washed his hands and face quickly, and went out without speaking. They heard him say something to Barney.

"Go upstairs—that'll be where you bunk and the other two can shake down in the front room here. We're pretty full up," said Barney loudly.

"Upstairs is where all the rest are, too," whispered Tex to Daly. "Camouflage for our benefit, I'll bet."

In the flickering light Daly noticed how Tex, despite his customary bodily languor seemed nevertheless to give forth an aura of leaping vitality. Their plight might be almost called desperate, and yet the Texan seemed to be afire with eagerness—positively enjoying himself.

"It looks as though we'd rambled right into the lion's den," MacDowell remarked with a chuckle. "I wonder what they're going to do about it. And I wonder what's in that big shed over there?"

Daly wiped his hands on a dirty towel.

"Tex, that cripple was Young, the fellow I gambled with so long in San Antonio and around this country," he said.

"Well, I'll be ——!"

MacDowell glanced at Daly briefly.

"Makes it sort of complicated all around, doesn't it?" he enquired casually.

"It sure does, but it may be that things will work out——"

He left the sentence unfinished as his

mind groped ahead in an endeavor to figure the probable course Young would take.

"Well, let's go out and sit around the warm kitchen with Barney. There'll be action of some kind rather soon, I imagine," he said, and they forthwith emerged from their sanitary retreat into the littered kitchen where the weather-beaten Barney was concocting nourishment.

XVI

UPSTAIRS eight worried men and one who seemed cheerful as a Spring morning were congregated, some in chairs, some on the cot bed, others against the wall. Mr. George D. Crane was walking up and down with noiseless steps, his head bent in worried thought.

"Has anybody gone to town with the message for the airdromes?" demanded Knugel suddenly. "I just took a ship for a flight without saying anything, and I'm bound to get in a report——"

"Yes, Slippy went," little Goodman told him.

"You say you hadn't heard the slightest rumor to account for those two birds dropping in here?" demanded Crane suddenly, turning to Knugel, who was smoking a cigar.

"Not a thing," returned Knugel. "In fact, I haven't been able to unearth a word or a clue since I've been there. I thought everything was quiet—Graves laid up in his tent and nothing doing except very frequent patrols."

"I wish to —— you hadn't got in so late this morning, Gary! That —— border ship picked you up, and that's what these fellows want to know about——"

"You mean they're onto our curves?" demanded the hard-faced Todd.

"Maybe. But they can't really know anything!" stated Crane as though trying to convince himself. "All you boys got in either so early or so late that you weren't noticed, except Gary. I'm sure nobody knows you're here, or that the ships are. And up in San Antonio and Dallas and Little Rock you're commercial flyers with your own ships and respected people. There hasn't been a move up north—they haven't dented our game a bit. It just simmers down to the fact that a strange ship was noticed on the ground here this morning, and in blow these two birds."

"And it's a cinch they're on business, too," stated Knugel. "Their story is just about as true as mine."

"Well, what're we going to do?" demanded the long-nosed, darkly thin Gary.

Crane paced the floor, and did not know. He weighed the different facets of the matter amid dead silence. One or two of the men moved uncomfortably. They were uneasy, undecided. Only Young smoked rapidly, grinned at the ceiling, and stuck his cap further back on the stubby black pompadour. His time would come.

Crane could not make up his mind. In a dozen northern cities were men like four of the group in that room, airplane pilots, who each, ostensibly, had his own ship and did passenger carrying. For three months there had been regular airplane trips between the border and San Antonio, San Antonio and Dallas, Dallas and Little Rock, and so on north.

A continuous stream of aerially transported drugs had been moving northward every other day. The ships, met by an automobile, used a different landing field almost every trip. The retailing of the contraband had been cleverly maneuvered by means of fool-proof camouflage—in many cases a small store had been started purely as a blind.

Then had come Graves, and for Crane, a panicky fear. After the miscarriage of that plan to get rid of the secret agent, he had decided on making just one more run. Buried deep in the concealed chamber they had fashioned in the cellar of the house there had been a king's ransom in drugs—heroin, morphine, opium, veronal—and he had decided on one last run. He was even on his investment, as was the Chief up in New York. But scarcely a cent of profit had come to him—but what lay in the cellar meant a small fortune to both him and the Chief.

Young, experienced border man as he was, with the aid of men like the dead Raney and Barney, he had handled getting the stuff and delivering it across the river—that was child's play with the aid of some well-paid Mexicans, and the men that were planted at strategic points.

He had decided to transport that fortune in drugs at one time—he dared not risk the steady flow which had been their custom. Not with Graves on the border. So the ship from Little Rock, and the one from

Dallas, and the two from San Antonio had come in, one by one, timing their arrival so that it was nightfall when they sneaked in. So carefully had they worked that the flyers had come in fifteen thousand feet high, and then glided for the field with dead motors to avoid announcing themselves. Airplanes on the border were commonplace, anyway, but they took no chances.

Within five minutes after they had arrived they had been hidden in the shed from prying eyes. Not a delivery had been made since Graves struck the border, but tomorrow morning, at the first crack of dawn, the four ships were to take wing for San Antonio, each loaded with hundreds of pounds of contraband worth seven hundred dollars a pound. At an isolated field outside the city gas and oil were waiting. One ship would deliver its load there, and stay to continue commercial flying. That was Gary's ship. The others would continue to Dallas, where another deserted pasture would be the scene of their landing. The Dallas ship—Todd's, that was—would drop off there, deliver its load to the waiting automobile, and the others continue to Little Rock and St. Louis.

By nightfall the distribution would be made—then lay low for months, if necessary, with the ships turned over to their pilots to do straight commercial flying, which they had been doing all along as camouflage. There was money in that, too, but very little. About enough to cover expenses and give the pilot a hundred a week or so. The pilots had been working for all they could get out of passengers, and a straight three-hundred-dollar split on each load of smuggled drugs they carried.

It had been a scheme and an organization of which he had been proud. Never in his days as a contractor had he organized or manipulated anything which worked so smoothly. Now, what to do? Risk that last delivery? How much did MacDowell and Daly know, if anything, about the scheme? They might not even be connected with Graves except casually—not in on his plans——"

"Here's the way I see it, Mr. Crane," came the voice of Gary.

Gary had been a sergeant-pilot in the French army for a time, and like the other airmen under Crane's control, was a nervy and unscrupulous adventurer.

"We're taking it for granted these guys downstairs know a —— of a lot. As a matter of fact, they probably don't know anything. As for them hopping the boys out in the woods, Goodman says them two dead ones were talking loud enough, and frank enough, to give their game away. Graves is laid up. Then they drop in here. What reason've we got to assume that they suspect we're smugglers, in the first place; that we're using ships, in the second? Or that we've any connection with what happened before?"

These words came soothingly to Crane's ears. He needed that money tremendously, but he was a business man, not a smuggler, and when it came to grips he was somewhat uncertain and indecisive at striking hard and quickly.

"We'd have to wait a day, maybe, till we got rid of 'em—" suggested Manners, a distinguished-looking, black-haired young fellow who had been cashiered from the American Air Service in 1918.

"Or else put 'em out of action temporarily," remarked Knugel, his hatred for Tex prompting the remark.

"No," said Crane decidedly. "If they are here on business there'll be somebody after 'em——"

"Cheer up, everybody!" chuckled Young. "I've got the answer."

Everybody looked at him in silent expectation.

"Assuming they know almost everything, still we're safe," Young went on, lighting a fresh cigaret with relish. " 'Cause why? Because, gentlemen, that Duke Daly is my old partner in crime. Eight years ago he and I were the slickest crooked gamblers you ever watched work, and we trimmed Texas from Dallas to El Paso and from Corpus Christi to the Panhandle. He's changed a lot, but he's the boy.

"Now I know the Duke—know 'im like I do my right hand. Item one—he's out for Number One, first, last and all the time. He's a lone wolf, and he's after his. Item two—he comes from an old Kentucky family, and he thinks the world and all of his folks. Used to write 'em every week and tell 'em more lies about what a fine job he had and all that. I read some of 'em by mistake—" Young chuckled at his own remark—"and I know. Now what's the answer?" he asked oratorically in boyish enjoyment at the sensation he was creating. Young was forty years old and did not look a day over thirty. His spirit was at times even younger than that.

"Why, here it is," he answered his own question. "I interview the Duke. I offer him, say, a thousand dollars to act nice, and also tell him that if he doesn't the world will know that Loot Daly is an ex-card sharp and all round confidence man, which will ruin his folks. See? Daly'd cut off his right arm to keep them from knowing that, and I guess he's enjoying himself in the army and he wouldn't want to get kicked out of that either."

"What about MacDowell?" snapped Crane.

"Here's the scheme. When I interview Daly I won't let on what we're doing—just say that I and the other boys've got something on and we don't want our retreat published to the world, see? Tell him all we want him to do is get out of here and forget he saw any of us here. Then I'll tell him to go back to MacDowell and tell that bird that he's been looking around—into the shed and maybe overheard us talking, and that there is absolutely nothing doing as far as we're concerned—that we're all right. With him telling his pal that, if they were looking for anything along the smuggling line, everything'll be fixed. Duke'll know there's something up, but the dough and the blackmail combined'll work like a charm."

There was a rapid, excited discussion. The fact that every man in the group, in Daly's place, would have done as Young expected Daly to do decided them.

"I know he knows me, but he isn't recognizing me," Young told them with a laugh. "He's scared to death for fear I'll get wise to who he is with that boy face of his. Who'd ever think the fresh-lookin' kid was one of the real guys in this country when it was a heap wilder'n what it is now?"

"I've been thinking this over," said Crane decisively. "I believe that through Young here we're all set to get rid of the two army men without trouble. But we must take no chances. What do you flyers say to getting out of here before daylight? The moon's bright as day, almost. We could hit San Antonio by dawn, and have everything out of here long before any possible interference."

They finally decided that Crane's idea was a good one. It was arranged that Young should interview the Duke after supper, and that the two flyers be got rid of by suggesting that they spend the night in town. With Daly to urge the matter on Tex, that appeared certain of success. If it was not, coarser measures might be necessary.

XVII

KNUGEL, for appearance sake, joined the other two flyers in the kitchen. He had decided to take off with the ships carrying the contraband and get into McMullen early. He was certain, now, that he was safe, with the hold over Daly he now had, and the certainty that Daly, being such a close friend of MacDowell's, could sheer Tex off from any information which might be detrimental to the plan.

He would leave McMullen very soon, collect his share, and go back to the metropolis toward which he had often turned longing eyes during his incarceration in Little Rock as a species of field man for the gang.

He masked his hatred of MacDowell successfully, and his heavy voice intoned a series of banal remarks anent the remarkable coincidence of their both having found the same landing field, as well as various carefully complimentary remarks concerning their hosts.

At supper Crane did not appear, of course, but the others talked cheerfully, each inspecting the two McMullen men with a great deal of interest. All of them had heard of MacDowell, and now Daly had become an intriguing character to them. Young did not show the slightest indication of ever having seen Daly before until the end of the meal.

Then he stood up and looked over at Daly with a grin.

"I'd like to speak to you for a moment in private," he said, his green eyes crinkling humorously.

"Sure," returned Daly easily. "Excuse us, everybody."

They walked down the short hall—the meal had been eaten in the kitchen—and out on the small porch.

"Hello, Duke," said Young suddenly, and held out his hand.

"Greetings, Young. I was hoping you wouldn't recognize me."

"Don't want no messages from departed bums, eh?" chuckled Young. "Well, Duke, you sure have changed your line of work since you and me was together—or is the army a good place for cleaning up at poker?"

"Fair—but I'm playing straight now."

"Tell that to the marines," scoffed Young. "Well, Duke, I want to talk over old times with yuh but business first. I b'lieve I owed you around a thousand dollars when we split, didn't I? Here it is, old sport."

Daly was completely surprized.

"Why, thanks," he said slowly.

"That's all right," said Young offhandedly, stumping to the edge of the veranda and lighting a new cigaret from the stub of the one he had been smoking. He threw the butt into the darkness.

"I might as well come to the point sooner as later," he said at length. "What the —— are you and MacDowell doing here, Duke?"

"We were on the way to Laredo, and had a forced landing," was the quiet reply.

"Maybe so, and maybe not," returned Young. "If you don't want to come clean, all right. But here's the point, Duke. I'm playing a game with these boys and we don't want no border patrolers around. See? And you don't want nobody spreading the story of your early career to the newspapers and getting you kicked out of the army and practically breaking your folks' hearts."

Daly had sensed what was coming, and was not surprised.

"Well?" he said evenly.

Young elaborated on the topic.

"We'll stroll around a while, and when we come back you can tell MacDowell there ain't nothing wrong with us, see? There is, I don't mind telling you, inasmuch as you and me did some of the same years ago. Then you persuade Tex to go to town for tonight with you and not come back till morning, and by that time the little deal'll be over."

"And if I don't?"

In the dim light of the lamp which was shining through the open door behind them Daly could see the inherent meanness in Young's face come to the surface.

"If you don't get out of here and forget you saw any of us here you might as well know that there won't be a newspaper in this country fail to have your pedigree in it. You go down with us, Duke. Don't forget that. Or if necessary, worse."

"What are you up to, Young? Why all this eagerness to get us out of the way?"

"That's my business."

Daly, sick at heart and yet knowing what he was going to do, decided to let nothing slip in making it a good job.

"What do you do with that ship—or those ships you keep in that hangar, Young?"

The chance shot told.

"How the——" Young began fiercely, and then stopped.

"There's no ships there. Where did you get that idea? Because a ship had a forced landing here this morning?"

"Just thought there might be. Well, Young, I guess you win. I'll walk around with you, as you say, and take a peek at things. Then I'll tell Tex I've met you, an old friend, and looked things over and they're all right and that we might as well go to town and have a good night's rest—that you haven't any comfortable place for us. Crane isn't here, is he?"

Once again Young could not mask his astonishment, although he finally said with well-acted wonder:

"Who's Crane?"

Daly, his face white, laughed mirthlessly.

"If this gang hadn't had you, Young, they'd have sure been up Salt Creek without a paddle," he remarked, and Young echoed mentally:

"I'll say so. Great ——, how much do they know?"

"But you've fixed it," Daly went on. "Let's walk around a while and then I'll go back and tell Tex I've seen the shed and talked with you, and all the rest of it."

The world was moonlit and peaceful, and the two army De Havilands bulked in shadowy impressiveness as they passed them. While Young recalled memories of the funeral of Peggy Cortana and other luscious morsels Daly was thinking thoughts of his own.

Once again he was battered back from the heights he had won. In the last few days he had finally found what it seemed he had been desiring all his life. He felt that at last he had found a place where he belonged; was having a share in work which was of his kind. There had come friendship, and a sense of utter content. He was taking part in big things, with men of his own breed.

And there had come, too, a glimmer of the greatness inherent in devotion to duty. Previously the army had been simply something to do—a living wage, varied duties, and the opportunity to take a ship and work off some of the periodic restlessness within him. It had been merely an attractive job. During his days on the border he had glimpsed a new vista—had become aware of his oath as an officer, and all it meant. There had arisen in him a fierce pride in the border patrol, and in his share in the adventurous task which had been set them. Life had become far more precious, in many ways, and there was meaning and significance in his uniform, his position, and the fact that men like Graves and MacDowell were his running mates—and trusted him. It was no longer Daly, alone, against the world; it was Daly, one of the border patrol, with friends by his side, fighting for something larger than self.

He talked with Young mechanically as they strolled around the field, but his thoughts were busy on things far afield from the cripple's chortling reminiscences. Young was feeling at peace with the world, and he conversed expansively. He even sounded Daly on prospects for a new alliance such as the old one had been, and Daly was noncommittal, answering in vague monosyllables. Except for his drawn face there was no indication that the flyer was touching depths of utter hopelessness.

Despair did not have any visible effect on him, but his brain was numb and his heart turned to lead. Unconsciously his whole being turned to MacDowell, the man whom he felt would be the lone one to stand by in the ruins which the morrow would bring. He strove to keep himself from thinking of the folks back in Kentucky, to whom the story of his shame would come to shatter their lives as completely as his own.

He shook himself, as though the physical action would help him throw the weight of it from his mind, and interrupted Young abruptly:

"What about Knugel? Of course I know he's in with you——"

"How do you know, Duke?"

"Same as I know a lot more stuff. As I said before, this gang ought to give you half their profits, because without you their goose would have been cooked. Will Knugel stay out here or go in with us?"

"Stay here. Tell Tex we ain't got room but for one. You're slick, Duke, and you'll know best how to save your own neck as far's throwin' your pal off the track goes. Say, Duke, how did you fellers get wise tuh all yuh know? Can't make no difference now—there won't be nothin' left of us tomorrow—but I'd like to know just for curiosity."

Daly, with that dead despair within him, mechanically played the game, taking neither interest nor excitement in it.

"Oh, we've been rounding you fellows up for months. We know how you've been transporting drugs by plane up through San Antonio and Dallas and on up through St. Louis to Chicago and Louisville and all those places. We've been waiting to land you right at the source, down here, and then swoop down up north. It's a cinch that Tex and I would have had the evidence on you before this night was out, if you hadn't come along. As it is, of course we'll report you all perfectly O. K. and the gang will continue to comb the border looking for the headquarters."

By adroit pumping along this line Young, safe in the knowledge of his absolute power utterly to ruin Daly, was induced to let hints escape him which were very valuable to Daly. In fact, the naive scoundrel took a pride in the wide-spreading organization which had poured money into his pockets for many weeks, and to Daly, as a connoisseur in that sort of thing, he could not refrain from boasting.

Finally Daly felt as though he could not go on further, alone. Perhaps when he confided in Tex it would be easier to stand. For himself it did not mean so much, but that he should have to drag the name of Daly through the mud and to blazon to the nation the fact that his father's son was a crook made him clench his hands until the nails bit the flesh and his eyes mirror tragic pain. It would have been infinitely more merciful to murder his parents in cold blood, he knew—and yet, for never an instant did his instinctive resolution waver.

"So long, Young," he said evenly as they stopped before the house. "Now Tex and I'll take a walk and then vamoose. We'll come back around noon tomorrow. How's that?"

"Fine. And say, Duke, where'll yuh be? I'd like to keep in touch with you——"

"I'll probably be on the border right along now, at McMullen," Daly lied wearily.

"Good. I'll see yuh," and Young stumped up the steps, his face alight with satisfaction.

With the hold he had over Daly it would not take long to get him to resign from the army and join him—and what a partner he would make, now! With that juvenile, frankly boyish countenance and his "class" he could trim the Union League Club! Young saw contented years of plenty looming ahead.

Daly found Tex helping Barney by wiping the dishes, and conversing casually about Texas in general and the border in particular with the taciturn smuggler.

"Can I see you for a moment, Tex?" he said quietly as he stood in the doorway.

MacDowell looked briefly at Daly's face and silently dispensed with the piece of flour-sacking which was doing duty as a dish-towel.

"Sure," he said, and came out.

"Let's take a little stroll," suggested Daly, his unwinking eyes staring out into the night.

Tex acquiesced with a nod and they went down the steps slowly. The shuffling of feet on the stairs reached their ears, and Young came out on the porch and took a seat on the top step, watching them as they moved toward the blurred bulk of the DeHavilands. They stopped beside the ships, in plain sight of Young but out of earshot.

"It's as I expected, Tex," Daly began without preamble. "Young knows who I am—his crooked partner of years ago. And he also knows I—I've got some folks up north and all that stuff. So he put the proposition to me cold."

He went on, unemotionally, explaining how he was to assure Tex that he had had an opportunity to find out all about the gang and that there was asbolutely nothing wrong with them. He also told the things he had found out by adroit bluffing.

"So they think they're safe as though they were in church," he concluded. "My idea is that they've got a big bunch of stuff on hand which they're going to run through tomorrow morning, and then quit—for a while, anyway. So we've got to get busy—quick, too, if we land 'em."

MacDowell's cigaret glowed redly for a moment, and then he removed it from his lips.

"Shake, Duke," said the Texan slowly, and thrust out his hand.

For the first time in twelve years there were hot tears in Daly's eyes as MacDowell's hand gripped his for a second.

"Here's my idea," Daly went on immediately, thankful that the darkness had hid his momentary weakness. "We'll go to town as scheduled. Then you get a car if you have to steal one and beat it for Laredo. You can have every ship swarming in here at dawn tomorrow. That'll get 'em cold—unless I'm badly mistaken there'll be three or four ships starting from this field tomorrow morning carrying a big consignment. I don't see how we can do a —— thing by ourselves—they're watching. I'll stick here and ease back to the field here along about one or two o'clock and keep watch just in case. Or, if you'd prefer to stay here I'll hit for Laredo. The main thing is to see that at the crack of dawn there's enough men here to round the bunch up without letting them get back across the river. One or two ships, with machine guns on, can keep 'em from crossing the river, and the rest land in fast and do the dirty work."

MacDowell with an effort that seemed a physical one, wrenched his mind from the tragedy personified by his friend, and turned his thoughts to what Daly had suggested. For a quarter-minute there was silence, broken only by the subdued talk reaching them from the house. Young was still on the steps, watching.

"I can't think of anything better," said MacDowell at length. "I think your idea is a —— good one."

He glanced up at the cloudless sky, in which a full moon floated in silvery magnificence. It was so light that one could almost read a paper.

"There wouldn't be any chance of getting men here by any other method than airplane—not time enough," he went on, as though thinking aloud. "'Phoning would be a chance, and I doubt whether we could get the field, either. It seems best. I have an idea that if I can spot a field on the way maybe Graves and I'll hop in a little ahead of the rest just to make sure nothing gets away. It's light enough."

"If anything comes up, which I don't believe there will, I'll be on the ground and do what I can," said Daly. "Well, there's no time to lose, I guess. It's getting along toward ten-thirty now, and you've got a lot of miles to go yet tonight."

"Dawn comes early, too," said Tex absently.

As they walked back toward the house

MacDowell, for the first time in his life, was depressed when faced with an emergency like the present one. All the joyous savor of the thing was swallowed in helpless sympathy for the quiet, repressed man who was walking beside him into a hopeless future. MacDowell's mind sought eagerly for some possible loop-hole by which Daly might be saved. With utter calm he examined the possibility of killing Young.

It was after the Texan and Daly had acted their parts and left for town under the guidance of Goodman, and after they had procured a room at the house which Goodman pointed out as the only hotel Guaylia boasted, that MacDowell mentioned Daly's predicament for the first time since that silent handshake. Goodman had gone back to the field, and the house was utterly quiet. They were about to slip out—Daly to work his way back to an observation point near the field and Tex to rout out a car by hook or crook.

"Duke, I may be butting in where I'm not wanted, old man, but some way, some how, I'm going to see to it personally that you don't get stung on this deal," Tex said, the lengthened words spoken softly to avoid disturbing other occupants of the house. "I sure admire to help a *man!*"

XVIII

IT WAS a little after three in the morning, and the air was crisply cold. Daly, hunched down behind the river bank, with the thin mesquite and undergrowth as an additional screen, changed his position wearily. He was cold and stiff, but physical discomfort was as nothing compared to the mental agony which had turned the leaden hours into long-drawn-out torture. His mouth was a thin line, and his eyes slightly sunken beneath drooping lids. He looked far older than he had a few short hours before.

Time and time again his life had passed in review before him during those hours, and time after time the thought of the Judge and his mother had made him wince with unbearable pain. Characteristically there was no self-pity—he had made his own bed and must lie in it. The folks were different.

Suddenly he stiffened. Men were emerging from the house. He looked again at his watch. Dawn was more than two hours away. He momentarily forgot himself as he saw ten men resolve themselves from the shadowed porch into the light of the low-sinking moon, and go toward the shed.

In a few moments a huge bulk, upheld by a two-wheeled dolly, trundled from the shed. In a few moments there were four big ships on the line.

"They're preparing early," he thought to himself. "Bramley Rovers, I guess."

His guess at the type of ship was correct. They were approximately the same size as a De Haviland, but built rather for weight-carrying than speed. Pilot and mechanic sat side by side in the front cockpit, and there was space for another passenger in the rear, in addition to baggage. The whole rear cockpit could be turned into a baggage compartment. The angle of attack of the big wings was large, which reduced the best speed to about seventy miles an hour, but each big craft was capable of carrying eight hundred pounds in addition to the pilot.

"Making a big run," Daly thought tensely, "just as we figured. Those ships can carry at least a ton of stuff between them—at seven hundred dollars a *pound!*"

It was staggering.

Suddenly a motor sprang into life. The Rovers were equipped with Liberty motors, he knew. In a few moments all four ships were idling softly. Streams of sparks swirled in the middle of the airdrome.

Daly shifted uneasily. Could it be that they were starting so early, or were they merely trying out the motors to make sure that there was not the slightest chance of a failure at the last minute? The field was four miles from town, and there was no danger of being overheard—he decided that his surmise was correct.

None of the motors were run up to their maximum. His practised ear could tell when the men in the cockpits shifted from two switches to only one, and then from one to another as they tried out the Libertys in every conceivable way.

Then he saw that his premise was wrong. For the men were putting on helmets and goggles. They were about to start, and the Laredo ships were not due until dawn!

His mind worked swiftly as he saw two men ensconce themselves in each ship, until finally there were but two left on the line. They were Knugel and Young. Knugel would be taking off for McMullen when it became light, and Young—probably he had already collected his share and would dive into Mexico. It was too late to give warning by going back to town and attempting to wire or phone—it was four miles, and the chances were that neither a wire nor a phone would be available in the little hamlet at this hour.

Should he go to Guaylia and send word to San Antonio? The only one he knew to warn would be the police, and he did not know where the ships would land—their field might be twenty miles from the city, and it would probably be two or three hours before he could get San Antonio, and by that time the ships would be nearly there. How could he explain over the phone who he was and what was up?

As the first ship turned loggily and started up the field Daly made up his mind. He worked swiftly along the bank until he was behind the natural screen formed by the house and shed. Then he slipped up and ran toward the house. It was a desperate chance, but he was gambling on the possibility that all the men were pulling out and that there would be no one to see him.

He gained shelter safely, and peered cautiously around. In the moonlight the big ships, all details blurred, were mysteriously menacing, seeming like squat monsters crawling awkwardly along, spitting streams of fire. One by one the motors roared wide open, and the stately craft took the air, looming black as midnight against the sky save for those crimson streamers from the exhausts.

Knugel and Young stood watching them, their backs toward the house. Daly slipped in the door, and then, safely hidden, waited impatiently.

The four Rovers did not tarry—they circled the field once, and then, in single file, five hundred feet high, headed northward. No sooner had the last ship cleared the field than Daly drew his Colt and cocked it. He peered cautiously through the doorway, and saw Knugel and Young walking slowly toward the house. The flyer drew back, and for a moment strained his ears to detect any sign of life in the house. There was a guttering candle lit in the kitchen, but no sign of human occupants. Evidently every last man had vanished with those ships, except Knugel and Young.

He could hear Knugel's exultant tones now.

"Gone, by ——! Unless those motors fail, Young, the biggest deal ever pulled is as good as in!"

"Ain't it a beaut, though!" chuckled Young. "Well, me for a few days with the ponies down to Juarez an' then——"

"Throw up your hands, and throw 'em quick!"

Daly appeared as though by magic from the doorway, and at the foot of the steps the two smugglers stood rooted in their tracks.

Crack! went a shot whistling over their heads, and their arms shot into the air as though pulled by the same string.

"I'll shoot either or both of you without thinking twice," he told the paralyzed victims evenly, "so don't even wink unless you want your first move to move you right into kingdom come."

Their faces were studies in complete astonishment as Daly, with ever-ready gun, used his other hand to remove a gun from Young's shoulder holster and Knugel's army Colt from his side.

"Now hump yourselves and crank my ship for me!" Daly commanded. "Turn around, and march!"

"You know what this means?" Young said in a half-whisper, licking dry lips.

"Yes, —— you. Beat it!"

Knugel hesitated. As plainly as though he had spoken Daly sensed the thought in the man's mind—would he stand a chance if he leaped forward?

"I'll shoot without hesitation," he told the reserve man quietly, their eyes locking.

It was the Duke Daly of years before, who had met and conquered Bushy Brennan and Pablo Fitzpatrick. Knugel knew. Without a word he and Young turned and under Daly's prodding from the rear walked rapidly toward the ship.

"No false moves, mind you," the flyer warned them.

His eyes never left them as he swung into the rear cockpit, and, standing on the seat, leaned over and groped for gas pet-cocks.

"Swing the prop," he commanded, and watched them narrowly while they obeyed.

Daly thought idly that he would not have been pleasantly situated right then in Knugel's hands, and without a gun. In Young's either, for that matter. It was a certainty that either man would have rejoiced in an opportunity to kill him right then.

"That's enough," he told them. "Step out on the left side here where I can see you."

They obeyed, and he leaned over the cowling which separated the two cockpits and clicked on both switches. Then he settled in the rear cockpit, and made sure that his free hand was on the throttle. He looked northward briefly, and a tiny, intermittent red glow told him that the Rovers were not far on their way.

"Contact, and swing heavy!"

He clamped the stick back between his knees, and held gun in one hand and throttle in the other. Young and Knugel, hand to hand, swung the big stick through and the motor caught on the first try. Having seen to it that the throttle was closed to idling Daly stood up and beckoned them around toward him with his gun. He stopped them at the end of the right wing.

"You'd better get down on your knees and thank the Lord that I've got to leave you here," he shouted to them. "Now get toward the house and don't even look around!"

Even in the camouflaging moonlight Knugel's darkly contorted face was enough to make one shiver, and in Young's narrowed green eyes there was a cold fury which projected itself across the intervening distance with venomous force. There was a second of hesitation, and then both men turned their backs to him and started for the house.

Daly risked replacing his Colt in its holster, and put on helmet and goggles, which by a fortuitous chance he had been carrying in the pocket of his leather coat. Then he opened the motor half-way for a moment. Although cold, it did not miss, and the radiolite dials glowed in pale reassurance—the battery was charging, the oil pressure satisfactory for a cold motor, and the air dial showing a good three pounds of pressure. The Centigrade thermometer was only fifty, but there was not an instant to waste.

He closed the motor shutters tight, and the Liberty barked suddenly like a hound on the scent as Daly swung the ship around in a sweeping circle, and pointed northward. There was room to take off from where he was, if nothing went wrong.

In five seconds the De Haviland was flashing across the field, nose to the earth so far that the propeller was barely missing the stubble. The thermometer leaped upward to sixty, and as the pilot lifted the ship off the ground the needle was still crawling higher. He cleared fence and bushes, and roared straight northward, as nearly as possible on the trail of the Rovers.

He left the motor wide open and put the ship in a steep climb and then reached down to unreel the antenna. 'Round and 'round went the wheel—it was for this that he had taken the back seat—and a silver thread, weighted at the end, spun out behind the speeding ship. He was five hundred feet high when he had completed the job, and then he leaned out and peered ahead. He thought he caught a glint of crimson far in the distance, but it might have been a star——

He would catch the slow ships in a few moments, anyway. He throttled the sturdy motor, which had not missed a beat despite the cruel mistreatment, and took a rapid look at the glowing instrument board. Satisfied, his right hand groped for the key, switched in the juice, and he began his message.

> Any border station—this is Daly. Laredo Laredo this is Daly. Smugglers in four airplanes bound north. I am following twenty miles north of Guaylia now—

On and on went the message, repeating over and over again the essential facts. He was sure that if MacDowell had reached Laredo at all there would be an operator on duty now—probably there was one on all night anyway during this special emergency. Nevertheless he kept repeating his message steadily, flying his ship by instinct.

It was for emergencies like this that flyers went through weary hours of telegraphy for month after month as cadets and officers. It was skill raised to the *n*th degree, for that roaring motor made that most essential aid to accuracy—the ear—entirely useless. And there were no written words to refer to—the message was sent without visual aid. Any man who has ever monkeyed with telegraphy or wireless knows what it means to have the aid of neither ear nor eye in sending.

At intervals Daly's eyes swept the starry sky ahead, and finally he found the fugitives. Like monstrous geese they were swooping along, still in single file, perhaps five miles ahead. They were merely blots against the sky, occasionally spitting fire.

Finally he dropped back in his cockpit with a sigh. There was little use in sending any more. The altimeter showed three thousand feet, and below there was a scene of such breathtaking beauty as is given few mortal eyes to gaze upon. All things unlovely were softened into beauty by the magic of moonlight and shadow—it was a limitless silver fairyland below swarming stars and a huge moon which shared the sky with the airplanes.

Daly was nearly up to the smugglers, and the southern rim of the mesquite desert which sprawled for a hundred and fifty miles ahead was in sight, looking like a huge lake, when his roving eye caught something that caused him to strain his eyes and then finally sink back with the first grim smile which had twisted his lips for hours. Another De Haviland was rapidly overhauling the caravan ahead.

It must be Tex MacDowell, and probably Graves was with him. It had been MacDowell's plan to take advantage of the moonlight and hustle the comparatively few miles back toward Guaylia, landing at a safe distance from the outlaw's retreat and joining Daly before dawn. It was simply an added safeguard against the possible anticipating of the Laredo flight's arrival on the scene. He had probably been in the air when he had seen the thundering planes ahead, and, with the same idea as Daly, camped on their trail.

"We've got 'em now—I wonder if they've seen us?" the Kentuckian reflected exultantly.

Then, in a sickening wave, he remembered who and what he was—that the success for which he was trying so hard meant disgrace, life-long exile, and a broken-hearted family. High above the sleeping earth Daly's head bowed in utter hopelessness, and eyes that were suddenly dull rested steadily on the ships ahead. All those men ahead knew—Young must have confided in them—and they, as well as Young himself, would take delight in dragging him down with them. From whatever corner of the world he might be passing through Young would send back the tale, for that was the sort of man he was.

In a few minutes he was slipping along a quarter of a mile to one side of the fleeing ships, his motor throttled to the limit in an endeavor to slow down to the speed of the Rovers. The other DeHaviland drew up within a few feet of him, and Graves and MacDowell waved to him. He answered, and then turned his head away. His eyes rested absently on the solid mesquite below. No more open fields now.

He watched the Rovers, wondering whether they would turn and make for the border. It was possible they had not seen him—they would not be looking, and at night it was deceptive.

He started to reel in the antenna, which would not be needed further. After a few turns of the wheel he glanced back to see how much of the woven wire remained. Far back, flaming intermittently against the sky, was a red glow.

Daly, suddenly taut once more, watched the Rovers briefly—apparently they had seen neither Tex nor himself, for they were driving steadily northward, a quarter of a mile away. Then he turned in his seat, and for two minutes watched the ship which was overhauling him from the rear.

It might be either Knugel, or one of the Laredo ships which had followed Tex. Daly banked over, and jockeyed his ship up to the other one until they were flying with wings that almost overlapped. He motioned back toward the other ship. The two black figures turned and watched. Finally Tex shook his head, as though puzzled.

That other ship must be Knugel's, Daly decided. But what could be his motive in following? With unwavering eyes he watched it as it rapidly took shape against the sky, coming nearer every minute. The pilots in the Rover must have all their faculties intent on the course ahead, for they were flitting on like ghosts.

MacDowell was watching that other ship, likewise. He had accounted in his own mind for Daly's presence—he had seen the Rovers take off, and managed to follow them in his own ship. Certainly Knugel would not be with the Rovers—that third ship looked like a De Haviland—it must be that Daly had forced Knugel to help him with his ship, and that Knugel had followed. But for what reason? To warn the Rovers to turn back to the border?

Almost simultaneously the two border pilots came to the same conclusion: Knugel, fearing that the Rovers would not spot their pursuers in the night, was coming ahead to wave them back to the border instead of allowing them to speed along into the arms of the law. Both flyers, turned fully around in their cockpits and flying mechanically, kept steady watch on the ship which was now but a few hundred yards behind them. The moon traced a circle of silver from the invisible metal propellor-tip, and behind that silvery sheen two black figures loomed plainly—Knugel had a passenger. Daly knew that it must be Young.

The third ship was five hundred feet higher than the level at which the others were traveling—now thirty five hundred feet. Perhaps a hundred yards back, and directly behind and above MacDowell and Graves, the De Haviland suddenly tilted over in a steep dive, pointed for Tex.

For a second or two MacDowell watched in wonder. Then, with a suddenness which took the Texan completely by surprise, thin sheets of flame poured from the top of the motor. MacDowell's dazed eyes took in three holes which appeared like magic in the left wing, shaking the ship—Knugel, if he it was, was using his machine guns on him!

In a split second Tex sent his ship into a straight nose dive and then banked steeply. The De Haviland answered, and Tex gasped with relief as he saw that no vital part was injured. The other ship roared overhead, shooting upward in a climbing turn and pointing for the attack again.

Tex dived until he was underneath the D. H. hovering above him, and then lifted his plane in a steep climbing turn. If Knugel wanted battle, he could have it.

Knugel came roaring down in a motor-spiral, trying to turn his ship until it pointed at MacDowell's craft, but Tex once again got up speed through diving, and shot beneath the other plane before giving Knugel a chance to shoot another burst. No sooner had the danger point been passed than Tex showed the first of a bag of tricks which were more than Knugel ever knew.

With all his extra speed to help he lifted the heavy bomber in an upward swoop which was like the beginning of a loop. At the top of the loop, with rudder and stick and the sensitiveness to his ship which the years had given him he chose the exact moment, and flopped the ship from its back to a right-side-up position. It was that rarest and most effective of maneuvers, the real Immelman Turn. It left him higher than Knugel, and pointed toward him. The reserve man was shooting upward in another climbing turn, and his ship was a fair target.

Down came the De Haviland's nose, aiming for the other ship now hovering in a near-stall at the top of the turn. Beneath the owl-like goggles MacDowell's wide mouth was stretched into a grin, and the flame of his eyes blazed through the glass shields. At the exact moment he pressed the machine-gun control on his stick, there came a brief burst—and then, despite his pressure, the guns ceased firing.

He had hit Knugel—he must have, but apparently no damage had been done, for the other ship was swooping toward him head on. And his guns had jammed!

The raging pilot dropped his ship downward and to one side as the bullets flamed from the other plane. It was a case of fly for the lives of himself and Graves now.

Subconsciously he knew it was hopeless. The best that could happen was to be forced to wreck in the mesquite, and that would mean that the caravan ahead would safely achieve their objective while he and Graves and the Duke lay down there in the wilderness. Daly's ship had no machine guns on it, he knew.

As he twisted and turned to stave off the fatal moment he had no chance to try to correct the jam in his guns. His mind worked on in that uproar of roaring motor and whining wires and trembling craft, already cruelly overstrained. Knugel's plan was obvious—to get rid of both Daly and himself, giving respite enough for the successful delivery of that fabulous cargo. Below was nothing but far-stretching mesquite, and no one would ever know what had happened.

As his ship twisted almost on its back in a fast reenversment he saw Daly's D. H. hovering close by.

"I guess we go down together," Tex thought to himself as his plane swooped out in a blinding rush.

Daly was thinking the same thing. His brain was in a whirl as he helplessly watched that Gargantuan battle. The Rovers were circling now, waiting for the outcome. In single file their huge bulks droned around, while in the middle of the circle two great bombers fought a deadly fight in the midst of the peaceful, brooding calm of starry sky and quiet, shadowed earth nearly a mile below.

Never for a moment was MacDowell's ship still—he was handling it as another man might have been able to control a little singleseater. So far none of the bursts which spat from Knugel's ship had reached him, and Knugel had few opportunities to aim. But the monsters of the air were getting lower and lower, and the end was inevitable.

Without any conscious process of reasoning the solution came to the raging Daly with a mental impact that made its execution seem inevitable. No sooner had it flashed into his mind than he had jammed his ship around to hurl it forward and downward on its mission.

Into the making of that decision went many elements—all that Daly was, fundamentally, and the life that had fashioned him. Thousands of pounds of wood and metal rushed downward, with sickening speed, because of battered, lonely years; because he had finally risen to the greatness of devotion to duty and a consciousness of its meaning; but mostly because, in that ship fighting for its life below, the only two friends he had in the world were striving to escape the crackling death which followed them.

In the sudden exaltation that gripped him such things as physical courage and fear of death were forgotten. There was no conscious courage, nor any fear or even thought of death as such in him. Straight as a string for Knugel's ship he sent his own great craft hurtling downward, the Liberty roaring wide open and every wire and strut quivering to the strain.

Once more Knugel's ship hovered loggily, mushing at the top of a turn, gathering speed which had been lost in the upward sweep. A hundred yards above it, coming at right angles in that terrific power-dive, was Daly, on his way to save his friends, make possible the capture of the men in those circling Rovers, and to expiate the past in one moment of greatness which would carry on the proud heritage of generations gone.

It was Young who grasped Knugel's shoulder—Daly could watch what happened in that second with curious detachment and clarity. Instantaneously the panic-stricken Knugel jammed on rudder and stick, and with down-pointed nose the DeHaviland flung one wing upward in the start of a ninety-degree spiral to escape the roaring destruction swooping down upon it.

Thus it was that Daly did not hit his prey amidships. Came a grinding crash, and suddenly his ship trembled in every fiber. With landing gear and right wing he had plowed through the upflung wing of Knugel's ship.

Daly, conscious of surprise that he was still conscious, snapped from the grip of that curious exaltation which had made him almost unconscious of his surroundings, to find his ship spinning slowly toward the ground. His right wing tip was a wreck. With rudder and stick he came out of the spin, only to hover and drop off on the other side. Slowly, lazily, in curious swoops and curves and stalls, the ship fluttered toward the ground, now in sickening speed, now in lazy, scarcely perceptible movements.

In wide spirals Tex circled downward. Suddenly a great ball of fire burst into flaring life on the ground. The flames glowed crimson against the sky itself, and as they licked greedily at the remains of what had been Knugel's ship two gruesome, unconscious figures could be plainly seen sprawled grotesquely in their mutual funeral pyre.

Still the Rovers circled above, watching. Round and round the crippled ship went Tex and Graves, their faces haggard as they watched Daly fight it. A thousand feet from the ground the D. H. was falling with sickening speed, only to change from the dive into a curious spin, gradually slowing, and then fluttering like a drifting leaf.

Tex was not fifty feet high when it hit. He saw it in the light of the terrific fire, as plainly as though he were standing within a few feet of the spot.

By the grace of the flyers' gods the DeHaviland had come level for a moment, perhaps twenty-five feet high, fallen off on the crippled wing, and swooped to the ground, crashing on the crippled wing-tip and the nose, apparently simultaneously. Had there been twenty-five feet more of altitude, it would have hit nose first. It crashed between the thin trees, and in a second was a heaped mound of linen and wood and motor, the tail assembly absolutely uninjured and sticking almost straight upward in the air. The red glow of the fire, a few hundred yards away, colored the scene with sinister light.

Round and round went the other border ship, but there was no movement in the nondescript heap below. Daly had been in the back seat—the ship had not caught fire——

High up in the graying sky the four big Rovers passed over the scene—flying south! It was Graves who gripped the Texan by the arm, and pointed to them. The secret agent's face was curiously gray. Otherwise he seemed utterly master of himself.

Tex looked upward, and his helmeted head nodded slowly. He took a last look at the ruins below. The job was up there, and for the moment he who had sacrificed himself to it must wait.

XIX

AS THE stars had faded and the sky in the east was turning from gray to blue as the DeHaviland came in sight of the Rio Grande. Tex, flying wide open, had gained five miles on the lumbering drug-ships, which were making for the border as fast as their motors would drag them.

Both occupants of the army ship searched the sky for signs of the Laredo ships, and were finally rewarded by the sight of a huge V, containing eleven ships, coming from the west. Tex picked them up first, and pointed them out to Graves, who nodded in satisfaction. Tex pressed his machine-gun control, which was on the stick, and made sure that the guns were working. The flight southward had given him an opportunity to correct the jam, which was in the ejection trip.

MacDowell, unaware that Daly had radioed a message to Laredo, flew to meet the formation. He turned, and alongside the leader he gestured northward toward the line of four ships. The leader, Captain Markham, nodded his understanding. At full speed the dozen ships roared along until they were above the former rendezvous of the smugglers. There the captain broke formation, and in single file they waited, circling.

Tex needed no instructions from Graves as to what to do. He was certain that he had the whip hand, now, and prepared to use it. Those Rovers carried no guns, he was sure, and his own was working perfectly now. If they wouldn't come down, he'd shoot one of them down. They must not cross into Mexico, or the sacrifice of Sibley, and probably Daly, would have been in vain.

The joy of the conflict had turned to ashes in bitter thoughts which swarmed in his mind as he though of that pitiful heap miles to the northward, and that moment of sheer greatness when Daly had deliberately sacrificed himself high in the air that he himself and Graves might be spared to accomplish the task before them.

The big flyer, subconsciously aware of these things, banked as he met the first ship of the group and jockeyed up alongside him. He pointed down toward the field ahead, and motioned with his hand to indicate a landing. Then he patted his machine gun, and fired a burst as illustration.

There was consternation on that ship—Tex thought he recognized Crane as one of the men in it. He throttled, and threw back until he was slightly behind the ship, ready for business. Would they land, or would they dare to go ahead?

They elected to try, it seemed, for a few hundred yards back of the field, with the border ships swarming around them, the leading Rovers did not start to dive. With the memory of all that had happened to strengthen his resolution Tex glanced around at Graves, received a nod, and pointed his ship. The salvo of death spat from his guns.

Apparently he had bagged the pilot, for the next moment the great, unwieldy ship was screwing toward the ground in a spin. In a few seconds it came level again, and wobbled earthward. Tex glanced around, and saw that the other Rovers, with their enemies like flies about them, had started for a landing. Then he dived down to watch his victim.

The ship seemed to be under partial control now—probably the pilot had been merely wounded. It circled uncertainly, and finally glided in from the side, toward the big shed. The space was too small, being the narrow way of the field, for any but the most skillful of landings. The Rover piled up against the shed, partly mashing the outer wall. One man started to climb out.

Tex wasted no time. With a quick look to make sure there was time before the other ships landed, he sideslipped in the same way the first ship had come, stalled over the boundary fence, close to the river, and dropped with a thud. The DeHaviland did not roll a hundred feet, and there was twenty-five yards to spare. He turned the ship until the guns pointed up the field, and then left the motor at idling speed.

"They won't get across this river," he said to Graves as he climbed out.

Graves smiled a fleeting, tight-lipped smile, and got out himself. Guns ready, the two waited as the second Rover came in and landed, escorted by two DeHavilands which, under the skillful direction of their young pilots, landed side by side with the Rover. The others came in under similar auspices.

"Mr. Graves, you're all right now, I guess," Tex said as the last ship landed. "They can't get away. If you don't mind, I'm going to check out and see if I can do anything for Daly. All right?"

"Certainly, my boy. Pray God he's alive!"

With bounding strides MacDowell started for the line, where the smugglers were being lined up under the direction of Captain Markham. All of the outlaws, apparently, realized the futility of resistance, for they obeyed under the threat of a half-dozen cocked Colts, and waited.

Within a half-minute Tex had procured slim young Don Goodhue's release, and as they ran for MacDowell's still idling ship he explained matters in gasping sentences. Graves was taking charge of matters as the two flyers got in the ship, Tex in the front cockpit, and took off past the seething group on the line.

In twenty minutes they had landed at Laredo. In ten minutes more MacDowell had a huge silken bag, attached to a shoulder harness, on his back, and his pockets were stuffed with food, medicine, including some whiskey, and water. His shirt was stuffed out with bandages and other first-aid materials.

The ship had been left idling. With Goodhue in the front and Tex piloting from the rear seat the big bomber took off once more. The Liberty, droning along as rhythmically as ever, turned up seventeen hundred and fifty revolutions a minute by the tachometer in the front cockpit as MacDowell, without wasting time to circle the field, sent it straight to the northeast.

He knew approximately where the wreck was, and was certain that what had been Knugel's ship would still be sending smoke into the still air. A hundred and twenty miles an hour was their speed, and a thousand feet their altitude, as the rim of the 'squite rolled away behind them. The sun was over the eastern horizon now, and the very thin ground-haze already dissolving beneath the slanting rays.

MacDowell flew with his eyes constantly sweeping the floor of grayish-green below, and finally was rewarded. Far ahead a tiny plume of smoke rose lazily in the air. Five minutes later they were over it. The wreck of Daly's ship was just as it had been. Tex gave silent thanks that there had been no lurking spark to cause a fire during the last hour.

A half-mile to the north there was a small break in the mesquite. It appeared to be about twenty five yards square, and there were two stumps in it. MacDowell shook the stick, and pointed to it. Goodhue nodded and took control. He cocked a knowing eye at the smoke drifting over the gruesome scene below, thereby ascertaining that there was practically no wind, and then banked around to get a straight approach to the clearing.

Tex loosened his belt and stood up, fighting the terrific airblast which made it a physical effort to stand up straight. Cautiously he threw one leg over the cowling and then, with one foot dangling over nothingness, turned faced inward, ready.

A hundred yards or so from the clearing Goodhue nodded, and stalled the ship by pulling its nose in the air. Tex threw his other leg over, and for a second hung across the cowling while his right finger found the ring of the ripcord. Then, with an uncontrollable sinking sensation, he literally fell off the ship, pushing himself with his free hand.

There was a second of curious peace in which the sensation of falling was unnoticeable, and then he pulled the cord. The parachute flapped out behind him, and then with a vicious snap that almost broke him in two it caught hold. He swung in a wide arc from side to side as the vent in the top of the bag, controlled by elastic bands, closed gradually, reducing his downward speed. When a 'chute first opens, this vent prevents the terrible snap which would result if the full surface were exposed to the air all at once.

At five hundred feet he was almost over the clearing, and was swinging only slightly. He grasped the shroudlines and pulled one side of the lifting surface down, sideslipping to prevent himself from being carried over the clearing and into the mesquite. By slipping his 'chute he dropped straight downward over his objective.

A hundred feet up he released the shroudlines and his speed slowed to fifteen feet a second. With knife ready to his hand he thrust both arms upward, hands ready. A few feet from the ground he grasped the shroudlines on both sides and lifted himself with his arms just as he hit, thereby reducing the shock by almost half. With relaxed muscles he thudded to the ground, stumbled, and fell. There was little wind, but he wasted no time in cutting himself free. He had escaped a stump by barely five feet—a broken leg would probably have been his souvenir of the experience had he come in contact with that obstacle.

Guiding himself by the dimly discernible smoke, he trotted laboriously through the wide-spaced mesquite, born down by the weight of his stuffed pockets and shirt. In a few moments, hot and perspiring, he found the wreck.

His heart was pounding, but not from the physical exertion alone, as he burrowed into the pile. The twisted, motionless body of Duke Daly came into view almost immediately. The fuselage had crumpled sideward, and Daly was still in the cockpit, strapped, hand still on the stick and one foot on the rudder. The other was twisted under him. The whole fuselage, he along with it, was on its side on the ground, and Daly's body partially touched the earth.

With careful hands Tex loosened the belt, cleared the wreckage, and lifted him out. His face was unmarred, and seemed strangely peaceful. MacDowell laid him on the ground, that one leg at a sinister angle from the knee, and then bent to listen.

Daly was alive.

On the side of the helmet which had been toward the ground there was a scarred surface. MacDowell surmised that it had been a terrific side-swipe against the earth which had knocked his friend unconscious. Before looking at that, however, he started on the leg.

The knee was dislocated, and the ankle broken. With a quick pull the dislocation was fixed. Tex watched Daly's eyes narrowly, but there was no fluttering response to the pain. Then, with strong fingers he tried to set the ankle, but could do nothing.

"I'd better not make things worse with any amateur work," he decided, so compromised on very tight bandaging. Major Searles, the flight surgeon, and others should arrive before nightfall.

This done, he stripped off the helmet and bathed and dressed the big discoloration, oozing blood, which showed where Duke's head had smashed the ground. Daly did not give the slightest sign of returning consciousness.

Then, with water and whiskey and much massaging MacDowell worked to bring Daly to life again. It took five minutes, but at last the eyelids fluttered and he was looking down into the puzzled eyes of the man who, by all the rules, should have been dead.

"Don't move—your ankle is broken," Tex warned quickly. "First thing you'd better do is bow to the east three times as appreciation of the fact that when you tried to commit suicide it went wrong. You got your men, just the same, though."

As the memory of those moments in the air came back to Daly his eyes were a study. Tex told him, briefly, of all that had happened—that the two men in the ship, certainly Knugel and Young, were dead and cremated, and that the whole gang had been captured.

"So I guess you don't need to worry about being kicked out of the army, old man," the Texan concluded as he saw the conflicting emotions spreading over the clean-cut countenance below him. "Young's gone, and there's no point in any of the others saying anything , if they know what to say. They've got no proof, and anyway Graves will hush it up. He's alive right now because of you, and my worthless carcass is here for the same reason. What you did up there would square up for almost anything, Duke."

"How did you get here?"

"Parachute—couldn't have enjoyed a smoke for a minute if I hadn't tried to find out how dead you were," drawled MacDowell. "Well, let's have food and drink. I'm as hungry as a lady wolf."

Later he inspected the fire. Some bones and metal were all that were left. The number on the motor, still discernible, proved the ship to be the McMullen DeHaviland flown by Knugel. In the light of what Daly had told him, identification was complete enough.

It grew comfortably warm during the day, and through the lazy hours the two airmen talked and napped and joked in the rare comradeship into which the crowded days had brought them. Toward evening the rescue party came, Major Searles in command, and in a few minutes the ankle was set and dressed and the party was striking eastward toward the railroad, where, by the efforts of Graves and Sheriff Trowbridge and Mayor Edwards and other notables, an engine and one car was waiting. Daly, so completely happy that a broken ankle was a mere bagatelle and pain but an incident, was carried on a stretcher.

They reached McMullen late that evening, and both Tex and Daly went promptly to sleep. The next morning, along toward noon, Tex was sitting alongside Daly's cot in the little tent. The sun flooded in through the open flaps with warm cheeriness, and outside, in vague snatches of sound there was the undertone of busy men carrying on the business of the flight, which was going on as usual.

Suddenly a form darkened the door, and in came Graves. He was in immaculate civilian clothes, and carried a suitcase.

"I'm on my way," he said smilingly. "The whole gang are safely ensconced in the San Antonio jail, and Crane gave us all the information we needed. By tonight the whole organization will have been safely rounded up."

He took off his gray fedora, laid it and his gloves on top of the suitcase, and lit a cigar. Tex could scarcely believe that this distinguished-looking, gray-haired man had been his passenger a few hours before during those breath-taking moments when death loomed so near.

"I understand from Major Searles that that ankle will probably leave you a very slight limp, Daly, and that it probably means that for the rest of your natural life you have the terrible prospect of drawing something over a hundred a month as a retired officer."

Daly nodded—Major Searles had told him the same thing.

"Any time life gets monotonous and you feel as though you'd like to get your hand in again, look me up," Graves went on easily. "Same to you, MacDowell."

The secret agent stood quietly for a moment, a slight smile on his face and his remarkably brilliant eyes suddenly soft as they rested on the two young fellows before him.

"I've had two opportunities to work with you flyers," he said at length; "and it's been a privilege. There's little I can say—but thank you, gentlemen. You've done your country a far from inconsiderable service. Some day, perhaps, you may be rewarded for it. Good-by."

They shook hands, and with a parting smile Graves walked out.

"They don't make many like him, do they?" was MacDowell's tribute.

As quietly as Graves left McMullen, he succeeded in being still more undramatic and retiring later. Newspaper reports were fragmentary and far from accurate, for the full story of grim, swift struggle on the border was never released. The arrests in various cities were hailed on the front pages as pointing to the "international drug ring" so familiar to newspaper readers, but "Federal agents" were responsible. Graves was never mentioned, nor were MacDowell and Daly.

All along the border, and gradually throughout the army, the full story leaked out, but never a line did the general public read of the events which had made possible the simultaneous arrest of hundreds of drug peddlers in thirteen different cities. That airplanes had been used to transport the contraband was never mentioned. The forces of the government were wise enough to know that the less the airplane was utilized for crime the easier their task would be. Far be it from them to give publicity to the idea.

Followed a month of convalescence for Daly. The actors, repressing their bursting curiosity as best they might and knowing only what wild rumor in McMullen told them, spent hours a day at the field until the time came for them to leave. Merle Hopper, especially, was often with Daly. If, when the stage folk finally waved good-by to a crowd of new friends and well-wishers at the depot, the vivacious little actress was unaccountably sad and the usually sparkling eyes were shadowed, no one noticed it particularly. The others were exuberant in their leave-takings, and addresses and promises of future meetings were exchanged, the addresses never to be used, probably, and the meetings never to take place, which is the way of those things.

To Daly that last month at McMullen was one of such peace and content as he had never known. He felt as though he had been physically and mentally taut for all those years, and had suddenly relaxed, the strain of them gone. He had found himself, friendship, and a place in the world.

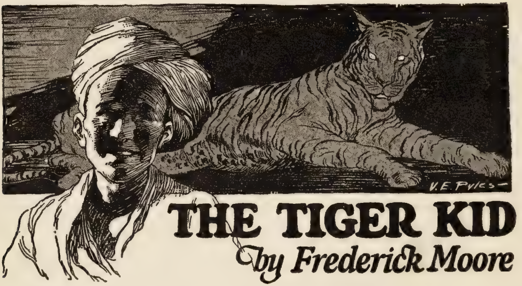
MacDowell flew him to San Antonio, whence Daly was to go to a Washington hospital for the formality of retirement. There were two gorgeous days of wassail together to top off a month of steady intimacy and deepening understanding of each other, until finally the Sunset Limited drew out of San Antonio for New Orleans with Daly on the observation platform, eyes on the big, lounging figure which stood on the platform until the train was far out of sight.

"After my jaunt home we'll get together and figure out something," had been Daly's last words.

Two hours later, a mile above the familiar panorama below, MacDowell thought of these words, and wondered. As his ship drove steadily southward that persistent feeling of having lost something precious was growing within him, and along with it a torturing restlessness which often swept over him, driving him into queer and excessive expedients to subdue it.

Perhaps the chapter headed "Daly" was closed—perhaps only beginning. Those crowded days were over—what lay ahead?

That thought—hopeful query of the adventurer the world over—took the place of retrospection in the mind of the big Texan as, a lonely speck in the sky, he winged his way back to the border.



THE TIGER KID

by Frederick Moore

Author of "Shipwrecked," "The Butterfly Hunter" etc.

"FAGGIN," says Cap'n Coddles to me as he come aboard our schooner, the *Laughing Jane*, in Manila, "Faggin, have you ever heard tell of people who sell theirselfs to the Old Nick?"

I was mate of the *Laughing Jane*, so I had to be diplomatic with my skipper.

"Dunno but what I have," says I, "but it never comes to no good end. How much you been offered?"

"It ain't me," says Coddles, picking his teeth, which he always done when he was thinking, whether he'd et or not.

Then he set down by the cabin table and took off his wig of hair, it being too hot for him. And I could see, spite of his having his hair off, the bald-headed old grampus had something on his mind.

"Somebody in the Flagship Bar?" says I.

"What made you think of the Flagship Bar?" he asked, his glass eye looking at me suspicious.

"You did," says I. "You're a walking advertisement for their brand of bitters.

"The Tiger Kid," copyright, 1923, by Frederick Moore.

And what's eating of you, if the mate of this packet might speak out as man to man to his skipper? I can see you've got a scheme of some kind. Maybe you'll want to borrow some money."

"No, thanks, Faggin—that is, I ain't thought of anything yet that needs money. But I'll remember your willingness when I do think——"

"I was just about to inform you that I'm broke," I puts in hasty.

"Then there's no harm done," says the skipper. "I just come from the Flagship Bar, and I seen a brown boy up there doing tricks of magic. I never see anything like what he can do."

"Mesmerizer?" asks I. "Shucks, you ain't seen nothing."

"No, no," said Cap'n Coddles, waving his hands. "There is some things you ain't seen, Faggin. And how this brown boy could do such things, unless he's sold himself to the devil, I can't make out."

"Well, that ain't no hide off'n us," I says. "If this schooner's going to sail for Borneo——"

"I need a cook's helper," says Coddles.

"You do?"

"Yes. And this brown boy, who's in tow of a rag-head wizard, wants to run away. He'll take a berth as cook's helper——"

"Oh, that's why you need one," says I. "Knew you'd thought up some way to spend extra money—and you want to join up a circus with us. Cap'n, in my opinion we got circus enough aboard now."

"What do you mean by that?" he barks.

"I ain't naming no names," says I, "but some skippers are so funny they carry their own side show, and one of 'em has the last initial of Coddles——"

"You don't have to be a fool just because you're mating in this schooner," says Coddles sharp-like.

"I wish I was sure of that," says I back to him. "I've had the suspicion more than once that it was the reason I was in this packet, and——"

"Hark at me," breaks in Coddles. "I can ship this boy as galley-hand for all the rice he'll eat, and a dry place to sleep——"

"And have the Old Nick aboard?" I asks.

"He can help the cook."

"Not if the cook knows it, he won't," says I. "And I won't eat any vittles that the——"

"Oh, belay that!" yelps Coddles. "I mean this boy. I'm trying to make things pleasant aboard. It ain't every skipper that'd hire a show to keep his mate laughing."

"He does it without extra expense," says I. "Many's the time I've laughed myself sick——"

"This brown boy," goes on Coddles, "is thin and spry. He wants to get back to Singapore, where his mother keeps a wizard's boarding-house. That's where he learned his trade. He's going to leave his boss behind. So I told him to slip the boss and come aboard, and while he's resting nights after his work he can do tricks for us. Say, Faggin! You ought to see him swallow a handful of pennies, one at a time, let 'em lodge in his neck, and then rattle 'em back of his Adam's apple, like a tin box full of iron washers. Gosh! I'd like to learn that trick from him myself, only I'm afraid the pennies'd git stuck."

"You don't take no chances, skipper, with money—that's your own," I remarks.

"And he can eat fire," goes on Coddles, waving his wig. "He lit a lot of cotton fuzz and eat it, fire and all."

"We'll most likely lose our insurance," says I. "But ship him if you want to."

IN ABOUT an hour the boy shows up. He was about sixteen, all legs and arms, thin face, coffee-colored, and eyes like a weasel that's missed a few meals. He hadn't nothing on but a red table-cloth and a turban, and he carried a little rag-bag with things to do tricks. His name was Poshander Rumchinder Singit, but we called him Joe and hid him in the galley till we sailed for a trading-post up a river in Borneo.

That night, when we was to sea, he brushed Coddles's extra suit and done it so well Cap'n Coddles the next morning couldn't find four pesos that was in the watch-pocket of the pants.

"I guess, after all, I spent that money," says Coddles.

"Maybe," says I. "But it looks to me like our first touch of magic—with the voice soft and low on the word touch."

"Well, I ain't going to start in by being too suspicious," says Coddles.

"Neither be I," says I. "But my advice is, you'd better be suspicious than broke."

"You got a grudge on the boy," he says.

"I got a trusting nature," says I. "But

he ain't going to brush none of my clothes."

"You don't trust nobody," says Coddles. "And you ain't got a kindly way."

"Such as it is, I ain't going to strain it none while this East Indian circus of yours is aboard," says I. "The next thing I do, is hide my watch."

I'll admit I was a little hasty. The boy was a wonder, right enough. That night he jumped up on the cabin table and tied hisself into running bowlines, crossed his feet behind his head and waggled his toes at us, and all such things. But what he done best was unwinding hisself. He done that by wrapping his legs around his waist and tucking in his arms; then Cap'n Coddles'd walk around the table, and Joe'd keep turning his head to watch him. When Coddles made six trips around the table, he'd pick Joe up by the ears and that brown boy would unspin his neck, letting his body do the unwinding with his neck the swivel.

And the way he took eggs out of his ears! That was the best trick he had. Coddles would sit and fair split hisself laughing, while the native cook stood in the passage of the cabin with his eyes sticking out like pickles. Only the egg trick played out in a few days. The weather was hot and the eggs didn't keep.

Then he had a way of swallering all of Coddles loose change, hit his neck with the ends of his fingers, and Sally Ann's cat—you could hear the money chink. To see Joe do that you'd think he was ballasted with silver money clean up to his chin, and all you had to do was tap him sharp-like, and he'd rattle like a sack full of tinware.

"White man call him debbil," Joe would say. "Me got many tricks—you see—many. Not all I show you, master."

"Come on," Coddles would say. "Let's have the whole lot, and I'll tell the cook to put currie in your rice."

But Joe'd shake his head and look sad as a bowlegged bosun.

"I do all of tricks, white man be'fraid from me," Joe would say. "You wait, we come S'pore side, I show you debbil trick. You wait—I show him you."

"But I don't want to wait till Singapore," Coddles would say. "I ain't afraid—go on—do your devil stuff. That's what I shipped you for, and I don't want any holdin' out."

But Joe he backed up on the thing. And Cap'n Coddles and him went on arguing about it day after day, with Joe doing the old tricks over and over. And Coddles worried. He was afraid of being skinned out of his money's worth, and he felt kind of cheap with me.

"He's done 'em all," says I. "That's all he'd got. If he could do anything more, he'd do it, but he wants to keep you thinking he's more of a wonder than he is."

That made Coddles mad at me. He swore Joe was a first-chop wizard, and could do almost anything he wanted to.

"It's you that's gummin' up the game," Coddles said. "He's afraid you'd be scared, and while he was in a trance or something, shoot him or throw him over the side."

"Oh, don't boo-boo me, skipper," I'd say.

"That's the trouble with you Down East Yankees," Coddles yelps. "You're so shrewd that you don't believe anything you ain't seen. You don't know what these East Indians can do, Faggin."

"I know as much as you do, and most of 'em is fakes," I said. "I saw a medicine show once in Bangor that brought an Indian chief to life."

"Oh, that's another kind of an Indian," breaks in Coddles.

"One suits me about as good as another, no matter how east he comes from, and for that——"

"Did your medicine-show wizard turn hisself into a tiger?" barks Coddles, thumping the cabin-table.

"No, and for a good reason," says I.

"What's that?" says Coddles.

"Nobody can do it," says I.

"Well, Joe can—and what's more, he will," says Coddles.

I looks at the skipper, wonderin' if he was getting slack in his top-hamper.

"You better take something for that," I advises him.

"For what?"

"Believing what that brown boy tells you. Nobody can turn theirselfs into a tiger—and keep out of a strait-jacket. It's ag'in' nature."

"Well, East Indians can do it," says Coddles. "I had a mate once, who knew a bosun, who talked with a cook who was in Calcutta, and seen it."

"They was all better liars than I am," was all I said.

"I'll make you believe it before we're done," said Coddles.

"You'll have to do it with a club," says I. "Joe can make you believe it, and that's all he wants. When you think it's so, that settles it. But if anybody aboard this schooner's going to turn tiger, they'll have to do more'n talk to suit me, and that includes you, even if you be skipper. There's some things a mate don't have to put up with, and I didn't sign aboard here to believe all that you do. I bought an electric belt once that was supposed to cure my rheumatiz, but all it done was tattoo a picture of Brooklyn Bridge around my waist. Since them days I don't believe much."

"But this bird is a real genu-wine East Indian wizard," insists Coddles.

"I don't care what part of the compass-card he comes from," says I, "nor what language he talks. And come to that, he can turn hisself into a giraffe with the mumps, but I won't believe it until I sees the swelling."

"You're an antiskeptick," says Coddles.

"I don't know what that is," I replies, holding my temper, "but I ain't it—leastways, I ain't been it since I bought some Kickapoo Indian corn salve that growed kidney bunions on my feet. I'm off all them Indians—they're all alike, East, West or South—fakes spelled in capitals. Furthermore, I don't want to ship-mate with no tigers, no matter whether they're turned to that from cabin-boys or growed natural in the woods. One tiger is as bad as another, no matter which way they turn, only when it comes to me, I'll turn the other way and push almost anything out of my way to have plenty of sea-room. If this boy Joe can turn hisself into a tiger, I can turn myself into the championist runner you ever seen, not barring that Finn who does the hundred-yard dash better'n most folks."

"Oh, you can't run," laughs Coddles. "All your joints is rusty."

"Then if I can't run, it'll be bad for your cabin-boy if he starts tigering around this packet," says I, and that made Coddles keep still.

But he snorted as he went out on deck, and cussed a little to show me how disgusted he was.

WELL, it got around in the crew that Joe was going to turn into a tiger. A native crew will believe almost anything about ghosts, folks changing theirselfs into animals, or finding money and pearls in a magic garden. To tell the truth, all them native birds like to believe in getting rich in any way except work.

I could hear the watch whispering nights about the fact we'd have a tiger aboard before long. And one evening when it got so noisy for'ard, I cuts loose at 'em.

"I'm tiger enough around this packet," I yells at 'em. "And if you don't stop this tiger talk, there won't be one back-bone in place by the time we lift the Borneo coast."

That shut 'em up, at least for when they knew I was in listening distance.

And Coddles got sorer and sorer.

"It's you that's discouraging that boy from doing his best trick," said the skipper. "You scare him, Faggin, talking the way you do. You ain't got no imagination. Don't be so set in your ways. At least, let Joe try it. Encourage him. It ain't every day we have somebody aboard who can turn into a tiger."

"Oh, I'll let him turn," says I. "He can be a whole menagerie for all of me, so long as he don't eat the cook. Come to that, we need a cook far more than we need wild animals in this boat."

Joe did act scared of me, and I felt sorry for it. He was such a nice boy, and willing to do his work. And he kept watching me out of the tail of his eye, and kept a good offing when I was around.

We made our landfall and worked up a big river on the east coast of Borneo. We anchored close in to a bank and put a mooring-line ashore around a nipa palm, 'cause the soft mud won't hold when the tides out and the current is strong. And we had to lay there a couple of days till a trader came down the river. So we let the crew ashore to have a good time in a native village up on a hill.

The second morning I was having a sleep, when I heard a yell from Coddles.

"What's up?" I asks. And I could see him out in the galley-passage, looking for'ard.

"By the Great Whangdoodle's brother-in-law!" yells Coddles.

I thought he was having a fit, and hurried out.

"He's done it!" yells Coddles, grabbing me by the arm.

"Done what?"

He pushes me back into the cabin.

"Now don't you go and spoil it, Faggin," he says, all excited up. "Maybe you'll have a little faith in Joe when you see what I seen. That boy's a wonder and I always knew it! Strike me blind for a Dutch fresh-water admiral, that brown boy has turned into a tiger!"

"You're seeing things," says I. "Didn't I tell you not to drink that gin last night."

"Gin nothin'," says he, waving his arms around his head and hopping up and down on one leg, which is his way when he's het up about anything. "If you don't believe it, come and have a look at Joe."

"I ain't afraid to look at Joe," says I, "only don't put my eyes out first, waving your hands in my face. Show him to me." With that I hops out in my night shirt and follers the skipper through the passage.

And when I see what I see, I got a jolt.

"Jumping cat-fish!" says I.

"Jumpin' nothin'," says Coddles. "That's Joe."

"Oh, is it?" says I. "How long has *that* been Joe?"

"Just a few minutes," says the skipper. "Don't be afraid."

"Oh, no," I whispers, "I don't want to be afraid—not when I see a tiger as big as Adam's off-ox on the forehatch, walking around and lashing his tail and grinding his teeth and sniffing at us as if he was late for breakfast."

And I started to back away.

But Coddles had got around behind me, and pushed me for'ard.

"You've got to be convinced," says he.

"By that time I'll be et," says I. "Back up, or I'll climb right over you."

"Oh, no," says Coddles, bracing himself on the bulkhead. "You never believed it could be done, and now that it's all in front of your eyes, you can't deny what you see. You've been making fun of me and Joe—well, we've proved what he can do, and you've got to admit it."

"I'll admit anything if I can have an exit," I says. "But I feel the need of my pants."

"Don't go, Faggin," says Coddles, gentle but firm. "He'll turn hisself back into Joe in a minute. I don't want you to miss it."

"I've had to buy my way into places to see things," says I, "but now I'll pay to get out. That tiger has missed several meals and I don't like the way his mouth hangs, so——"

"Wait," says Coddles. "Have a little patience, so——"

"Gangway!" says I. "Lemme go past!"

"No, sir," says Coddles. "I want you to see this magic stuff work."

I grabs him around the waist and twists him so he's between me and the big cat outside. Then I shoves him on the fore-deck, and shuts the door so I had about two inches to look through.

"Now," says I, "you can talk to Joe all you wants. But what I'd like to ask is, where was Joe when you saw him last—Joe when he looks like Joe?"

"Why," says Coddles, "he was out on deck here. One minute it was Joe, and the next it was the tiger."

"Did you see him when he turned hisself?"

"No," says Coddles. "I didn't happen to be looking. But I can prove it."

"Now's your chance," says I. "But I'll keep the door the way it is till he turns back."

"You danged fool!" says Coddles. "Can't you see a little magic without getting scared?"

"I can when I see it," says I. "Maybe that's a trick tiger, and maybe it ain't. If it is, he's so darned good that Joe's got me fooled. I'll wait till he turns back to Joe, and then I'll show some enthusiasm. Or go ahead and make him talk."

"But Joe can't talk like a human being when he's a tiger," says Coddles.

"Mur-ough!" says the tiger.

"So I notice," says I to Coddles. "I'll admit Joe ain't much on language while he's tigering."

"Not when he's changed, no," says Coddles.

"Oh, Joe's changed, all right," I admits. "But the way he's changed is, he's been et."

"Et, fiddlesticks!" snorts Coddles. "This thing's gone far enough!"

"Tell that to Joe," says I, calm and peaceful.

Now the tiger was grinding his teeth, and beginning to spit. He had hisself kind of scrounched down to jump, and his tail was waving, while he kept his eyes on Coddles like a cat ready to do the grand jump on a mouse. But Coddles didn't seem to be scared, he was that sure the bull-size tiger was Joe.

"You might as well shift yourself back to cabin-boy, Joe, and git breakfast, seeing's the cook's gone," says Coddles to the tiger. "When we've had coffee, then you can turn to a tiger again, just to prove to that ding-danged fool of a mate of mine that it can be done."

"Wee-e-e-o-u-r-r-r-h!" says the tiger, low down in his throat.

"Come on, look sharp!" says Coddles, losing his patience. "If the crew comes back, you'll scare 'em away, looking like a tiger. You've done enough to prove it to me, Joe, and we'll let it go at that."

"Mee-r-i-a-h!" says the tiger, crosser than ever, and his back bunched up.

"What you better do," says I to Coddles, "is let me pass you out the shotgun."

"Belay the jaw!" snorts Coddles to me. "I'll handle this in my own way!"

"All right," says I. "But I want to remind you that when I shipped as mate of the *Laughing Jane* I thought it was a schooner, not a lunatic asylum."

Coddles reached his hands out to the tiger and moved a little—just a little—toward him.

"Joe," he says, "you pipe down on this tiger stuff for now, or I'll part your hair with a belaying-pin—when you turn yourself back to a cabin-boy!"

"Yes, when," says I. "Not before, you won't part his hair, but when."

"Oh, shut up," says Coddles.

"I won't do it," says I. "If you're so sure that's Joe, why don't you walk up to him and kick him in the slats."

"I'm sure enough," says Coddles.

"No, you ain't," says I. "But you wanted me to be sure. Now's your time to convince me. Slap his mouth!"

I COULD see Coddles was beginning to get nervous, for which I didn't blame him much. He didn't like the way Tiger Joe was acting. He had his nose down on his paws, and he seemed to be measuring the fore-deck with his eyes, to make sure he'd light on Coddles when he lit.

"I'll fix your clock, Joe," says Coddles. "If you think I'm feeding you best quality crew-rice not to do what I says, I'll put you in irons! This ain't no time to argue. Switch yourself back to cabin-boy, and move navy-style!"

The tiger just kind of wiped his front teeth with his tongue.

At that, Coddles begins to cuss, and he starts back for my door. I thought maybe he'd got sense, but it was a rope's end he was after—or so he said. But he stops before he got to the door—and a grin comes over his face. For there was Joe, looking out of a galley port-hole.

"That's the stuff, Joe!" says the skipper "Only I didn't know it was done that way. You sure are quick!"

But Joe paid no attention to the skipper: The boy was shivering, and his eyes was bugging out—and he was looking straight at the tiger behind Coddles.

"It's all right, Joe," says the skipper. "You don't need to be afraid." And to me he sings out, "Do you believe it now, you ding-danged idjut?"

He knew I could see Joe through the galley door.

"Up to a certain extent I do," says I. "But just what is it you want me to believe."

"Why, Joe's turned back again from a tiger," says the skipper.

"Well, if he has," says I, "something has jammed. When Joe turned, he didn't take the tiger with him. Outside of that, everything's all right, but that fact alone rather complicates things for me."

"Why, what do you mean?" asks Coddles, foamy at the mouth he was that mad. "Don't you believe what you see with your own eyes?"

"Sure I do," says I. "I'm looking at your tiger."

"Wh-a-a-t?"

And Coddles gives a start and turns and looks for'ard. His mouth opened wide, and his legs begin to shiver. Then all of a sudden he comes to life like one of these dollar alarm clocks that unships its mainspring and begins to do a shimmy dance when it rings. Because the skipper goes straight up in the air, and when he lights, it's on top of the cabin-trunk—and from there he goes into the mizzen-rigging, hand over hand, like there was ten million dollars somewhere up there, and that if he didn't hurry it might fall into the sea.

I slams the door and runs aft, Joe follering me. When I gits on the quarter-deck I've got an elephant-gun in my hands.

"Great jumping cat-fish!" yells the skipper.

"Where them tiger feller she's comes from?" squeaks Joe to me.

"Where!" yells Coddles to Joe. "That's a nice question for you to ask, with me up in the cross-trees! Ding-dang your skin! You and your tiger-turning. In another minute I'd a-pulled that big cat's nose, and—B-r-u-r-rr! It gives me the shivers to think how near I come to kicking that tiger in the chops!"

"Him bad feller lady-tiger," says Joe.

"Shut up!" yells Coddles. "If he'd bit my head off, I'd ha' fixed you! And if you know so much about tigers, you go down and drive him away! I don't want him sitting around aboard my schooner!"

The tiger takes a squint up at him.

"All right, you see, I'm fix tiger," says Joe, and with that he ducks down into the main-cabin and runs for the galley.

And the next we know, Joe begins to heave out on the fore-deck all the tin pie-plates, pails, kettles, frying-pans and so on, till the fore-deck sounds like a boiler-factory on double shift.

The tiger begins to snarl. He didn't like pie-plates sailing at him and whanging around. He just bunched down on his feet, dug his toe-nails in and went sailing through the air for the bank of the river. He lit in the bushes, and was gone.

And Coddles comes down from the mizzen-cross-trees.

"Joe," he says, "you certainly knows how to deal with tigers. But don't you never say tiger to me again—not nothing about turning into 'em. I've had enough to last me, and if I ever hears tiger aboard here again"—and with that he slants me a mean eye—"I'll skin the man, boy or mate who utters the well-known word!"

"Cap'n," says I, respectful-like, and bowing to him, "from the way you went into the cross-trees when you discovered that the tiger wasn't Joe, you acted so tough and fearless, that it's my opinion you ought to give up skippering and git a job trompling wild elephants."

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

Two-Fisted Sermon

ONCE in the Army Y my religious work director preached the Sunday sermon for about a full hour—dry as dirt. All about—Well, I don't like even to sound sacrilegious so I'll leave it to you to know how it went.

There were about ten boys in the immense tent. Finishing he turned to me.

"Do you wish to say a word, Mr. Adams?"

Well—I riz up, scratching my head, saying, "I never say no to a hard job—a man can't do that sort of thing."

But when I had gotten well to the platform the boys from outside had quit boxing, ball, etc., and by the time I had chucked my coat onto the dusty piano the tent was filling up.

Then I spoke for about three minutes, a bit to the point. No sob stuff.

I don't know what I said in the slightest. When I wound up I said something like this:

"You birds are from all the nations of the earth and are of all the religions, and lots of you have none. You're all my gang—I'm one of the bunch— My God may not suit you, but, this is all I've to offer and it's all yours."

And I held out my hand, leaving the platform.

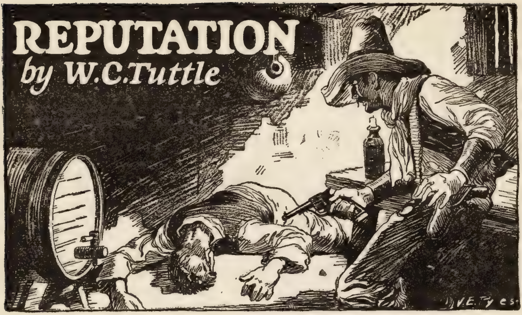
I don't think any man's sermon ever went home as that did. I can hear them cheering now.

Well, if I ever start talking about camp—no end to it.

But when they advertised me—these Y people—to speak at a certain service I felt tied and fell flat down.

REPUTATION

by W.C.Tuttle



Author of "Tramps of the Range," "The Misdeal," etc.

"EL *TIGRE! Madre de Dios!*" A man must indeed have the soul of a devil to draw such an exclamation at the mere mention of his name.

"The Tiger! Mother of God!"

We of Santa Ynez, a little handful of folks living in a little mission village, near the Mexican border, knew him only by reputation. But that was enough.

Riders dropped in at the little cantina and over their cups of *tequila* or warm beer would tell us of some new deviltry done by Jeff Tigard, the killer. And Felipe's hands trembled as he drew the beer, while we laughed at him for being such a coward.

What would the Tiger do in Santa Ynez, we asked each other. There is nothing for him here.

"Who knows, *señores?*" trembled Felipe. "Always the tales come closer to Santa Ynez. Some day he will come."

"Perhaps to cut off your ears," laughed Ramon, who is very brave. "I hear that the Tiger strings them on a gold thread and wears them for a girdle."

"*Diable!*" swore Mendez, whose fierce beard belies his character. "Are we weaklings? One man—bah! Tiger, indeed! The devil may own his soul, but his body is mortal—and mortal man dies."

Mendez gulped his warm beer and waited for someone to challenge his statement. It was very warm in the little, one-story adobe cantina; too warm for heated argument, even over the Tiger.

"Mendez speaks true," nodded Pasquale, who is not a Mexican, but Italian. "Mortal man dies—when he is killed. That is the point, *compadres*. This Tiger will most surely die—when he is killed. More beer, Felipe."

"But why should the Tiger come to Santa Ynez?" asked Felipe nervously, clattering the mug-bottoms on the rough table-top.

"*Dios!*" swore Mendez angrily. "One might think he had sent you a message, Felipe. You are like a timid hen which hears the rustle of a hawk's wings in every stirring breeze."

Ramon laughed softly and drained his mug.

"Why should we have fear of that man? It is true that he has the soul of a devil. Men have told us that he is without a conscience and that he kills men for sport. It must be so.

"But we of Santa Ynez need not fear this man. We live at peace with everyone. Our vineyards are loaded, the hills are dotted with our cattle and horses and there is nothing but good in our hearts. There remains only the fact that Felipe serves his beer too warm."

Ramon laughed joyously and slapped Mendez on the back.

"Is is not so, *compadre?* We do not fear the Tiger, eh?"

"Fear?" Mendez rumbled deep in his beard. "I fear no man. I am Mendez."

"And thou art full of warm beer," stated Pasquale, laughing loudly.

Mendez joined the laugh, even at his own expense, for Mendez was full of beer, which always makes him boastful, but not angry.

IT WAS very hot in Santa Ynez, as I have said before, but that day it was oppressive. The very sky seemed to press down upon the earth. Even the cattle seemed to stand in silent wonder and did not eat.

The piñon pines on the high hills were as black blots against the sky-line, and the cañons seemed to send out faint whisperings to the hills and valleys. Perhaps the cañons knew and were telling that a storm was coming.

But no whispering was needed to tell us that the Storm God was preparing for a ride through the valley of the Santa Ynez. Long lines of cattle were winding their way off the hills, like great jointed serpents, seeking the shelter of the lowlands.

The little street of the village was deserted. Not a horse was tied at the hitch-racks. The bright colors of the adobe houses had faded in that queer light, and were now only a gray.

Gone were the laughing voices of the children, which had filled the street. Even the dogs were in hiding. It was as if a great calamity had fallen, although there was nothing—except fear and caution.

And then, from the westward, high over the tops of the mountains, which look down upon the Pacific, came the cloud; like the belching of a mighty furnace. Swiftly it blotted out the sun, and a semidarkness settled upon the valley. But there was none of the coolness of the night.

At the door of the cantina we watched it come—that cloud. There were Ramon, Mendez, Pasquale, Pancho, a herder, Felipe and myself. None of us had wives to go home to.

We had been intently watching this cloud, but now the whole sky seemed overcast, dropping lower and lower, as if to crush out the world.

A dog started across the street toward us, but stopped, sniffing at the air. A gust of wind stirred the dust at its feet, and, with a whimper, as if of pain, it turned back, leaning sideways in its walk, as if bracing against the wind which had not yet come.

"Let us have beer," said Mendez softly. "*Madre de Dios!* That dog bracing against a ghost wind makes me weak of the spine."

"Thou art Mendez," said Pasquale, as if to remind Mendez of his former boasting.

"But I am not that Mendez. Just now I am sober, and I have no stomach to be sober at a time like this."

We went into the cantina. I think we were all in need of artificial courage. Felipe lighted the candles which guttered in the draught and cast grotesque shadows on the wall; shadows which danced drunkenly at our every move.

Felipe swore softly at his drawing. "Even the beer is wild tonight. I can not keep it in the mugs."

"That was ever my greatest trouble," laughed Mendez. "They are forever becoming empty. Hurry, Felipe, or I shall drink from the spigot."

The wind was wailing now, and from a distance came the jarring of thunder, like roll of a mighty drum. It was not good to hear. Then the candles paled in the flash of the lightning.

Mendez drained his mug and thrust it back at Felipe.

"More!" he panted. "*Madre de Dios,* what a night—for a sober man!"

He but echoed our sentiments. A drift of rain pattered upon the cantina. Then, like the roar of a stampeded herd, the storm was upon us. We sat in awe, as the cantina seemed to fairly writhe in the grasp of that mighty wind and the thunder beat a devil's tattoo on our very roof.

Flash after flash, so close together that they seemed one great light, the lightning seemed to hiss through that whirling, howling tempest. And the swirling candle flame danced the shadows on the wall, whenever the lightning ceased for a moment.

Felipe was praying on his knees, with his forehead against a beer cask. I think I laughed, but it was not with mirth. I could see Mendez, his eyes shut tight and lips moving. Perhaps I might have prayed, but I knew no prayer at that time. My thoughts were jumbled.

The door crashed open, letting in a mighty swirl of wind and rain, which extinguished the candles.

I sprang across the room and forced the door shut.

I thought there was some one near the door, but could not see. Ramon was lighting the candles, bringing the room back to a half-light again. The wind roared against the door, rattling the bar, as if angry at being cheated.

I was looking at Mendez and he was no longer praying. His eyes were wide open now and he was staring toward the door.

I TURNED. Just between me and the door stood a man, whose eyes glittered like beads under the brim of his rain-drenched sombrero. The evils of purgatory showd in every line of his face; the hawk-like nose, scarred chin and thin-lipped, grinning mouth.

Two heavy revolvers rested in holsters at his hips, and the cartridges in his crossed belts gleamed like points of light. He wore black leather chaparajos, with wide, flaring sides, which flopped like the wings of a great buzzard.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

He laughed at us mockingly, while the water spewed off his clothes and ran in dirty puddles along the dirt floor.

"Welcome, *señor*," said Pasquale in a weak voice.

"What need have I of welcome?"

The man's voice was like the hoarse croak of an angry buzzard. He took a step forward and dropped his claw-like hands to his holsters.

"Afraid to talk?" he sneered. "Know who I am?"

He leered around at us and hunched his shoulders, as if about to attack.

"I am the Tiger."

No need to tell us that. We knew it. His looks did not belie his reputation. For he was every inch a killer.

Perhaps he could see the fear in our eyes and it served to fan his devilish egotism. He leered at Felipe, who crossed himself, and the action caused the Tiger much merriment.

"What do you want here?" queried Ramon huskily.

"Want? Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

He threw back his head and laughed, but his beady eyes watched closely.

"What does the Tiger always want?" He shoved out a claw-like hand, opening and closing it. "Gold! Give me your gold—all of it!"

"I have little gold, *señor*," whined Felipe. "We are poor people in Santa Ynez."

The storm still raged, but we gave it no heed now.

"Liars!" snarled the Tiger. "I teach men to tell the truth. Give me the gold, fool!"

Felipe got slowly to his feet and moved back of his small counter, where he kept his money.

"Stop!" commanded the Tiger. "Do you think I am a fool?"

Felipe stopped, and the Tiger went slowly over to him, keeping an eye on us all the while. He shoved Felipe aside and picked up the money box. It was nearly empty and the Tiger threw it aside with a curse.

"Were you expecting me?"

He shoved his evil face close to Felipe, as he spoke, and Felipe recoiled in terror.

"But I told you that we are poor men, *señor*," protested Felipe.

"Bah!"

The Tiger drew a gun and struck Felipe a slashing blow on the head. Felipe crumpled at his feet. It was a dastardly thing to do, and I sprang to my feet, but the unwavering muzzle of the gun pointed straight at my middle and I sat down again.

Felipe tried to get to his feet, but the Tiger kicked him viciously.

"Fool! I said I wanted gold—not a few mangy silver coins."

"He has no gold," said Ramon softly. "He does not lie, *señor*."

"Did I speak to you?" asked the Tiger angrily. "When I ask for your gold you may lie—if you dare."

It was a strange sight there in the little cantina. Poor Felipe sprawled at the feet of the Tiger, his hands outspread on the floor, while the Tiger leaned forward facing us, a snarl writhing his thin lips.

Ramon was backed against the table, and almost into Mendez's chair. Pasquale was sprawled forward, his arms on the table-top, while I hunched in my chair, afraid to move, I think.

Suddenly the Tiger whipped off his dripping sombrero and sent it spinning on to the table. A whisp of the water struck me in the eyes, but I did not blink.

"Put your gold in the hat," said the Tiger. "I have stayed too long."

"But *señor*—" Ramon started to protest.

"Gold—not lies!" rasped the Tiger.

I moved my feet to enable me to get into my pocket, and they came in contact with something. It was Pancho under the table. I had forgotten him. For a moment I thought perhaps he was intending to shoot the Tiger. Pancho was armed, because I could see the butt of his pistol, but his attitude was one of cramped prayer.

I tossed my slender wallet into the hat and prayed that the Tiger might not see how meager it was. Behind me the door creaked, as if from the wind, but when I looked up at the Tiger I knew that it was not wind.

He was standing in the same position, gun leveled at us, but the sneer seemed frozen on his face and his eyes were dilated. I looked back.

At the closed door stood a man, empty-handed. He was dressed in the loose shirt, baggy pants, worn shoes of a peon. He wore no hat and his wet, colorless hair hung bedraggled about his face.

He was rather scrawny looking, thin of face, and his eyes were gray and very level. I glanced back at the Tiger. He had dropped the gun and stepped back against Felipe's counter. I think his eyes were closed, but it was hard to tell in that weak light.

"Welcome, *señor*," said Mendez huskily.

"*Gracias, señor.*"

The man spoke softly, and there was a half-smile on his lips, as he crossed to the Tiger, who threw up one arm, as if to ward off a blow. It was as if he were hypnotized. We watched in amazement.

He looked down at Felipe and turned his head toward us, as he said, in Spanish,

"Move him to an easier position and wash away the blood."

Mendez and I picked him up and placed him near the table, but we were too interested to take time in doctoring poor Felipe. The Tiger had not moved. Now the stranger unbuckled the Tiger's belts and let them fall to the floor.

"Undress," ordered the stranger.

The Tiger slowly removed every garment. He seemed like a man asleep. Not once did he speak nor make a sign, and he stood there, stripped to the skin, while the stranger dressed in the cowboy garb, tossing the peon garments aside.

The stranger dumped the wallets out of the sombrero and put it on his head.

"It was a teriffic storm, *señores*," said the stranger softly. "It fairly blew my horse from under me, and at times I despaired of finishing my quest."

"*Señor*, we do not understand," said Ramon, pointing at the stripped Tiger.

"It is a short tale," smiled the stranger. "I was a guest at this man's house. It was miles from here. Not so far, perhaps, if one went as the crow flies, but there have been many twistings which made it long.

"This man had a wife, and but one bed. To me they gave the bed, because I was their guest. But I am not the kind of a man who deprives a woman; so I gave her the bed.

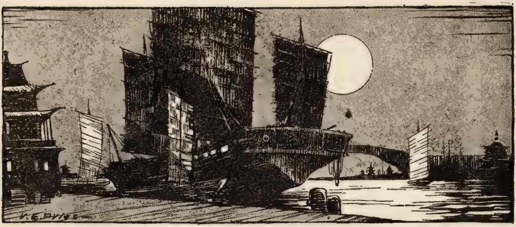
"This man did not know. I had much gold which he wanted. He thought that I was in that bed. That is the tale, *señores*. It was not nice."

He turned and motioned to the Tiger. The rain still whipped in from the west, but he drove the Tiger out into it, while we crowded into the doorway. Swiftly the stranger uncoiled a rope and dropped a loop around the neck of the Tiger, and mounted his horse.

"*Señor*," called Ramon, "we shall wonder much over this, and not know whom we shall mention in our prayers. Who art thou?"

And from out of the darkness, in the direction of the vanishing rider, came the words—

"Jefferson Tigard, *señores;* and thank you. *Buenas noches.*"



TRIAL OF A TIMID MAN

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by William Ashley Anderson

Author of "The Defense of Yang Chow"

WHEN Joseph Barclay signed a contract with the Chingwa Trading Company in San Francisco to work for three years in North China, his employers felt that they had made a good selection; but, less than a month after his arrival in Tientsin, the local manager, William H. Carson, was convinced of the contrary. The promising young business man was an absolute dud.

He was clever; he did not drink too much; he was fastidious in his personal habits; and the native women filled him with abhorrence. Yet he was hopeless.

Closing the doors of the office, so that none of the Chinese assistants could listen to the conversation, Carson said to Barclay:

"What's the matter? Just plain cold feet?"

"No, sir."

"I can't understand it then. The kind of boys I want have got to have plain common sense, and ordinary nerve—but that's all. Nothing remarkable. The work's as simple as selling baker's bread. You understand what I'm trying to do, don't you?"

"I think so," said Barclay sullenly.

"Well, it's perfectly plain. This is the situation. All foreign countries have agreed to do business with China only through these cubby-holes called Treaty Ports. Foreigners are not permitted to trade in the interior. They must not even remain in any town or village outside the Ports for more than three days. Well, all foreigners have been living up to that agreement like a lot of sheep. Result is that the amount of business done in the Treaty Ports compared to the amount of business foreigners *might* do, is like a caraway-seed in a hopper of rice. It never occurred to any one, until we came along, that foreigners are not restricted against establishing native agents in the interior. And that's just what we propose to do—and are doing."

"Oh, I understand all that."

Carson was an exceptionally large man, full-figured, with a florid complexion, and a bland expression. Steel-rimmed glasses, hooked firmly over his ears and settled so tightly upon the grooved bridge of his nose that they seemed to be a permanent fixture, added considerably to his dignity. He was a man who rose superior to petty annoyances, crowding his way through the world spurning the hindrances that upset more sensitive men. With a brilliant mind he combined genial but implacable firmness and an elephantine energy. Raising his palm with an impressive gesture not unlike an ecclesiastical salute, he said firmly.

"Well, whether or not you understand it, I'm going over it again, because I want to find out exactly what's wrong with you.

The work I expected you to do—first as an assistant, then as a district manager—was to go out in the country districts with an experienced interpreter, and visit every market-town in the territory. In each one of those towns I wanted you to get one of the Chinese merchants to act as our local agent—buying goods from us to be shipped direct from Tientsin; and sending in return anything we can use in the export trade——"

"I probably understand the business possibilities as well as you do," interposed Barclay impatiently.

Carson's hand came down with a crash upon his desk.

"Well, then," he said with exasperation, "what the —— *is* the matter?"

"I don't like the people," Barclay blurted, "and I don't like the country. I don't like anything about them! Nothing!"

Carson gave a snort of mingled amazement and laughter. Barclay, taking out a silk handkerchief and wiping his wrists, glared back at him resentfully. The two, facing each other, seemed like a fat genial man laughingly taunting a furious boy.

Barclay was small, slim, dapper in his neatness, with a trim, pointed mustache, such as only fops wore at that time, and large brown eyes that glowed angrily.

After catching his breath, Carson said to him good-humoredly:

"Well, none of us are working for love. But we've got to work just the same."

"Not in China! Not for me! I tell you I'm through!"

"Through! Why, you haven't even started——"

"I've seen enough, just the same. I'm through."

"Oh!" A dangerous glint suddenly appeared in Carson's eyes.

Lowering his voice, with an angry timbre in it, he said threateningly—

"Well, young fellow, if your idea was to enjoy an excursion to China and back again at the expense of this firm, it seems to me there's something criminal in that——"

"No!" protested Barclay vehemently. "I'm willing to refund my passage money—and pay my own way back."

"That puts a different complexion on it." Carson's expression softened, and his big frame relaxed. "If you'll pay me what you owe the company, I'll sign a release tomorrow—and you can go home whenever you please. I'm disappointed, of course; but I'll be satisfied to get rid of you."

Barclay opened his mouth to reply. Then closed it again, and bit his lip trembling as if trying desperately to repress some unusual emotion. After a moment he said falteringly:

"No. I can't. I didn't stop to think. I—I'm completely broke!"

"Well, then," roared Carson with sudden rage, raising his hand once more in an emphatic gesture, "you'll work—or—or, by ——, you'll starve. It looks to me like a plain swindle. I'm not going to be made a fool of by my employees. Do you understand?"

After a moment's silence, Barclay said miserably:

"Mr. Carson, you—you struck it right. I—I simply have got cold feet! I—I can't help it! I can't help it! I've tried to get over it—and—and I can't!"

"What!"

Carson swung slowly about in his chair, and studied Barclay with fresh interest.

"When I signed my contract in San Francisco," said Barclay, with a sudden burst of confidence, "I had an entirely different idea of China. I had done business with Chinese at home, and they seemed all right. And the Americans I knew who had been over here were enthusiastic about it. But when I got to Shanghai, every one I met began to tell me things that were pretty rotten, and I'll admit they began to get on my nerves——"

"Spoofing you," said Carson. "Good Lord, that sort of thing's a joke!"

"I thought so, too. But I began to notice things. They made me sick—the stinks, the dirt, the disease, the squalor, the callousness. I understand a bit of Chinese from studying in San Francisco, but I didn't know that ordinary street conversation was so obscene——"

Carson again snorted with laughter.

"Yes, I know," said Barclay, "*that's* funny. But it made me realize the truth in what I heard. And I could see rotten diseases everywhere. They told me of all the fellows who'd died recently from cholera, and warned me to keep heavy flannel over my stomach. I didn't have any cholera-band, so I wrapped myself round and round with a fresh woolen blanket on the steamer coming up the coast, and by the time I arrived here in Tientsin I had an itch all over my body! It took me a week to get rid of it!"

Carson roared with laughter. Barclay shrugged his shoulders lightly and continued:

"I didn't mind that, either. But then they told me about tortures—crushing toes, beating the muscles to a pulp, maggots in the gangrened sores, strangulation, *lingchi*— You know *lingchi*—death by a thousand cuts? Well, there was a man who'd recently come up from Canton where he said he'd seen it. They were executing a woman. They tied her to a cross on the execution grounds, and the executioner started by cutting off two steaks and throwing them to the crowd!"

Carson jerked off his glasses and wiped the fogged lenses.

"Barclay," he said, "the trouble is, you've only seen one side of the picture. You're absolutely morbid!"

"Oh, I realized that," said Barclay, "and I swallowed my feelings, and laughed. But about a week ago I went down into the native city here, with your interpreter, Liu—and it was the filthiest place! Swarming flies—undrained gutters—beggars that were falling apart! Liu took me into a *yamen*, and it was just my luck to run into a Chinese trial.

"They had a criminal there, lying on his stomach on a board, with his legs and arms drawn back, his thumbs tied to his big toes; and the executioner had been beating him on the thighs until they were purple and bursting. When we came in, they stopped the beating and brought out a beam which they were going to place over his legs and jump on until they broke his bones. I left before that! But the gate-keeper made me pay half a dollar to get out, and the crowd laughed at my squeamishness——"

Carson stood up, and walked impatiently up and down the room waving his arms. "You win! You win!" he said at length. "I think I understand how you feel. I wouldn't call it cowardice——"

"It's the diseases that upset me most," said Barclay. "I don't think it's cowardice to be afraid of germs."

"Well," said Carson, sitting down once more and adjusting his glasses, "I don't intend to give you an argument. But I want to explain. You've had the bad luck to see the dirty side first; but these tortures you talk of are just as rare as for a man to be struck by lightning in the United States. They make them particularly horrible in order to discourage crime—and they *do* discourage crime! Some one recently made the statement that a modern civilized man couldn't live a week in medieval Europe. That's rot, of course, but it illustrates what's happened to you. Chinese civilization is parallel with what we had a few hundred years ago. There's a rumor that the Empress Dowager recently tried to poison her own son. Well, she's not so different from the Borgia, Elizabeth, and Catherine. You'll have to get adjusted to it, that's all."

"I've tried," said Barclay unhappily; "and I simply can't!"

"Now, don't get *too* —— squeamish about it," said Carson sternly. "I'm giving you a chance. What we'll do is this. Your work will be confined to this office; and I won't expect you to leave the foreign settlement until you get accustomed to the Chinese—and feel less—eh—funky about working among them."

BARCLAY had his quarters in the hotel by the river.

Upon leaving the office he made direct for the hotel and remained as near it as possible. He showed no interest in anything outside a short radius of this refuge, confining himself to books and the chance acquaintance of tourists. Not many boats ascended the river at this time, because the stream had fallen considerably owing to a severe drouth, and large ships would not attempt to navigate the tortuous channel across the alluvial plain that stretched away to the sea. But the few that did arrive fascinated him. They presented a lure that kept his thoughts and hopes straining homeward. He made no effort better to understand the Chinese, or to draw nearer to them. After a while this obsessing fear of his became a joke that people laughed at.

It was a year of strained nerves and warped tempers.

Barclay, fresh to the country, and hypersensitive to impressions, perhaps felt a sickness in China before old-timers became aware of anything unusual. There was drouth, famine, restlessness throughout the provinces. A curious unease pervaded the atmosphere, as if an unguessed calamity were impending. It was like the electric tension that seems to fill the air before the coming of a hot dust-storm, or a typhoon.

The Chinese felt it, and some were inclined to apprehension, and some were swept out of their phlegmatic calm by gusts of violent passion.

Among the less impressionable foreigners things seemed much the same as usual, only hotter, depressing, maddeningly dull. Women were aware of the unusual before the men. Though they could not explain their nervousness, they were inclined to be petulant, jumpy, hysterical.

Curious rumors of trouble began to drift in from the country.

Carson, who was in close touch with the country markets, felt that something was wrong, but believed it due to a general business depression. Very much concerned over the affairs of the newly expanding company, he began to worry about collections. His agents were holding back their remittances. These debts, individually small, totalled a large sum that Carson needed. The bank had recently been inquiring about his drafts; and when a bank begins to ask questions, a man has a right to start worrying.

On top of all this, Carson suddenly received a telegram requiring his presence without delay in Shanghai. The managing director there assumed that Barclay could handle local affairs during Carson's absence. Carson felt a sickening wave of guilt. He should, of course, have reported Barclay's uselessness at the very beginning, but he had let his personal feelings sway his business judgment. The result was he found himself marooned at the moment he most needed assistance. If he could persuade Barclay to make a flying trip with him to visit the country agents, he felt he might take a chance and leave him in charge of the Tientsin territory.

In desperation, therefore, he called Barclay into his office, as the younger man was about to return to the hotel, and stated the problem clearly.

"Well?" said Barclay uneasily.

"Well!" echoed Carson with exasperation. "I want you to make the trip into the country with me."

"No, sir," said Barclay.

"What! Don't you see that this is a very serious emergency?"

"I can't help that," said Barclay a little wildly. "You know exactly how I feel—and—and I will not leave the foreign settlement!"

"You're a rotten quitter, Barclay! I've given you every chance—and you're letting me down. If you only had one half-inch of guts in your miserable little body——"

But Barclay turned abruptly and left the office.

Stepping into a 'ricksha that the gateman called for him, he was bowled rapidly away toward the hotel, trembling slightly as he thought of the possibilities of that abrupt interview.

"Phew," he said, as he descended from the 'ricksha and felt in his pocket for a coin, at the same time studying the sweating coolie from head to foot with an expression of complete disgust. "What a filthy beast!"

Not understanding a word, the grinning coolie held out a wet hand and received double fare. Instantly assuming that there was a chance for extortion, the coolie let the shafts fall with a clatter, stepped up on the curb, and began to shout shrilly for his just hire. So sure was he of a victim that he caught Barclay roughly by the sleeve.

Twisting spasmodically, Barclay struck the coolie sharply across the knuckles with his light stick. Wildly he struck at him again. The coolie dodged, and, gathering up the shafts in one movement, bounded away to a safe distance. Then he moved more slowly, grinning sheepishly at the banter of passing natives.

Barclay ascended the steps brushing off his sleeve, and in another minute forgot the incident in a glass of cold lemon squash.

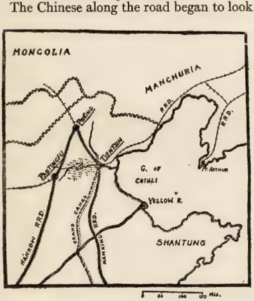
The coolie, however, acted in an extraordinary manner. His spleen smothered his good-nature. As he progressed, thinking it over, his grinning sheepishness gave place to sullen resentment.

When a Chinese entertains a grievance, it might lead to anything, most probably revengeful suicide upon the doorstep of his tormentor. This coolie, however, was of a more expressive temperament. All his miseries suddenly rushed in upon him; all his miseries were as suddenly blown forth as from the mouth of a volcano by an explosion of the man's *chi*.

With a yell he slammed the shafts down upon the pavement and leaped into the middle of the street. There he planted himself, all his muscles tense and twitching, froth flecking the corners of his half-open drooping mouth as an increasing torrent of curses and obscenity poured forth. Every Chinese within sight stood still and looked at him with a faint enigmatic smile. All the coolie needed was an audience.

He spat in the dust, shaking his head like an angry bull. He flung his greasy cap down, disclosing an unkempt head. His face was dark, with a low forehead, and eyebrows drawn down ferociously over wild black eyes. From a roar his voice rose in crescendo to a shrill piercing shriek. He leaped in the air, and landing with both feet planted belligerently apart, tore his thin jacket from his powerful body streaked with sweat and flecked with froth, and posed for combat. He defied the foreigner; he defied all foreigners. There was nothing too filthy to be said about the foreign devil. As for all foreign devils, his idea was to torture them in the following manners——

The Chinese along the road began to look uncomfortable and rapidly dispersed. A policeman, attracted by the uproar, came cautiously around the corner. The bareheaded, maddened coolie caught his breath and stared at the mandarin-capped policeman. The policeman's eyes brightened with interest, and his walk quickened into a shuffle. The shuffle broke into a run. With a grunt, the coolie spun on his heel and fled, leaving his 'ricksha and garments behind him.



The policeman examined them with interest. A bystander intimated informatively—

"That man was an athlete?"

"A Boxer," said the policeman.

Unaware of the blistering challenges that had been hurled after him from the broad highway, Barclay had made himself comfortable in a wicker chair at a table where a young English lady, Miss Beatrice Tyndal, was sitting with her mother, inwardly praying for a breath of cool air from the river. After drawing feverishly through the straws buried deep in cracked ice and sour liquid, looking across the table at Miss Tyndal, Barclay said—

"Now I'm happy again!"

The girl's consciously indifferent gaze continued to rest on the distant bank of the river. But her plump mother, tortured by the heat, commenced to fan herself vigorously.

"How can you say that, Mr. Barclay? It's purgatory! I don't care what you think of the word! It's positively purgatory! You can thank heaven, boy, you're not a fat old woman like me."

"Ah," said Barclay with a flattering inflection, "if all plump ladies——"

"No! No! No! This is no time for compliments. Tell them to bring me another cool drink. If I survive, I shall certainly go to the shore. I want to see the ocean."

"Ah!" said Barclay.

"And Beatrice says she is going to Paotingfu—of all places."

"Paotingfu! Why, that's due west of here—inland. It must be terribly hot. But why Paotingfu, Miss Tyndal?"

"Who knows?" said Mrs. Tyndal with increasing excitement. "I think the child's mad. By houseboat, too. Some friends from Shanghai—want to see the interior—the gawping fools!"

"But it's impossible," expostulated Barclay. "You haven't any idea of the danger—the diseases—and then this trouble they're talking about. It may be serious—and it's spreading. From all I've heard these Boxers are not a joke!"

Casually the girl lifted her eyes to Barclay, and laughed.

"The only thing to be afraid of out here, Mr. Barclay, is to be afraid."

Barclay winced faintly.

"Oh, well," he said, recovering his composure, "if you want to go to Paotingfu, don't let me interfere."

"I shan't, Mr. Barclay!"

"As to fear, sometimes it's a wholesome thing. I admit I don't want to be a scaldhead—or to go about scratching myself the rest of my life. Prickly heat is bad enough."

"We know all about your preferences," said the girl irritably, for despite her cool-looking cheeks and fresh white gown, she was herself suffering the torment of prickly heat. "You prefer to be where there are soldiers. You wouldn't *dare* go to Paotingfu. That takes courage!"

"Ah!" said Barclay, rising abruptly to his feet. Under his breath he murmured confusedly: "That's too much! That's too much!"

Turning sharply, he made his way stiffly among the tables, his head burning, his heart fluttering miserably. Had it been any other woman who made the remark, Barclay might have turned it flippantly, or even shrugged indifferently, because his abhorrence of the Chinese was too deep seated to be upset by a word; but Beatrice Tyndal was a girl who affected a love for rough outdoor sports and daring adventures. Her remark implied, therefore, that though a girl, she was more of a man than he!

Barclay stood on the curb in front of the hotel for almost five minutes without moving. Suddenly with a sharp curse he walked away swiftly without further hesitation until he arrived at the office, and stood before Carson.

"Whenever you want to start," he said hurriedly, as if afraid of changing his own mind. "I'm ready to go into the country with you!"

AFTER two days by junk down the open sewer that is the Grand Canal, the little party procured ponies and turned westward across the dun-colored, sun-baked plains of the province of Chih-li.

It was Carson's intention to swing northward on a line half-way between Tientsin and Paotingfu, continuing until they reached the town of Chow-chow whence it was only a short ride to the new railway line connecting with Peking.

Life on the junk had not been too bad, for at least they had been able to eat like civilized creatures, sitting at a table on long-legged chairs with a punkah slowly stirring the air above them. The crew, stripped to the waist, kept to the tow-path, dragging the boat at the end of a long rope. The junk was freshly varnished, and the decks were kept clean by a continual drenching and scrubbing by the boatman. Both Carson and Barclay had tiny rooms with neatly kept berths. Books were scattered about on the tables, with cards, and bottles of drinks. The chop-box was well filled; and the cook-boy, Wonga, was an excellent servant.

Comparatively speaking, they traveled in luxury.

But the condition of the Grand Canal itself was at its worst. Owing to the prevailing drouth, and the demands of the dust-dry districts bordering the canal, the channel had shrunk until in places two large junks found difficulty in passing each other. Diked up by unnumbered generations of tireless workers, the bed of the stream was actually above the level of the surrounding plain, so that the clayey banks, devoid of every spear of vegetation, completely shut out a view of the country the foreigners were traversing. The canal, built on time contracts, writhed across the perfectly flat plain; but the only view that Carson and Barclay had was of the two drab banks, sun-cracked mud flats dotted with gray turtles, and occasional ramshackle villages at ferry crossings.

It was not necessary to go ashore until the third night, since Carson's agents came on board the junk to talk business.

But the third day they turned their backs on the junk, which immediately set out on its return to Tientsin, and set off with a grotesque little caravan toward the nearest walled town. Night came on as the carts, bumping along reluctantly behind mixed teams of jaded donkeys and bullocks, turned into the deep-rutted dusty main street of a dilapidated village balanced on either side of a levee designed to restrain the waters of the canal when flood took the place of drouth.

The party consisted of Carson, Barclay, Liu the interpreter, and Wonga the cook-boy. Liu was a phlegmatic northerner from Harbin, with Manchu blood in his veins, sturdy and rather stupid though he had received a good education. Wonga was a happy-go-lucky, laughing, impudent opportunist, impatient at the stupidity of others, and quite as capable of breaking a horse as of poaching an egg.

Wonga, on foot, was the first to enter the village. He announced the arrival of a party of high mandarin rank. Then returning to Carson, he reported that the countryside was starved to the point of desperation, and the roads were infested with bandits. Carson was secretly of the opinion that Wonga had met some one he knew—a woman, or a good cook; but a glance at the expression on Barclay's face decided the question. With an exclamation full of disgust he said—

"All right, we'll stop here, and give your rotten nerves a chance to recuperate."

Barclay said nothing, but dismounted gratefully.

The only available accomodation for the night was a dirty little room at the rear of a miserable restaurant perched on the edge of a back-water. The mud-floor of the eating-room was littered with refuse; the rough tables were wet and slimy; the walls and raftered ceiling were dingy with the smoke from castor-oil lamps. It was heavy with the smell of cooking; and a number of gloomy coolies and loafers were eating noisily at the tables, only raising their eyes furtively to look at the foreigners as they made their way through a black gap in the rear wall which was the door to the inner compound.

The wizened old restaurant keeper, turning his faded eyes on his guests, waved a crooked finger in the direction of one of the uttermost corners of the yard, and grunted—

"There is your room."

Liu and Wonga were accomodated on trestles in the eating-room.

The small enclosure upon which Carson's and Barclay's room opened, was surrounded on the three remaining sides by cattle sheds and tumbledown storehouses. It was choked up with dilapidated carts, boat-rigging, and heaps of litter among which hogs were grunting and rooting about. The rank smell of the hogs and the greasy odor of cooking were the only evidences of life, until Wonga came into the room with a smoking bean-oil lamp.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Barclay looking about the room with a shudder. "We can't sleep here! It's horrible!"

The room was a cubby-hole, with a beaten mud floor, and a crumbling *k'ang* against the wall, upon which they were supposed to sleep. A thin skin of paper, which formed the ceiling, hung in forlorn tatters. The walls were covered with cobwebs, soot, and obscene drawings and doggerel, affording illiminating evidence as to the character of the usual occupants.

"Ugh!" repeated Barclay with increasing horror. "I tell you we can't sleep here! That *k'ang* is covered with bugs!"

Carson yawned indifferently and stretched his powerful arms.

"All right," he said cheerfully, "sleep out in the yard with the pigs, if you prefer. Wonga!"

The boy came running with a steaming pot of tea and a bowl of curried eggs which he placed on the rickety table. The big man immediately filled his plate with food and ate with enjoyment, calling over his shoulder between mouthfuls:

"Wonga, put the legs of the cots in saucers of oil! I don't want strangers at a banquet tonight! Tell Liu to have the carts ready to leave at daybreak tomorrow. Put the satchel of money under my cot. There. Right! Now, clear out and don't disturb us."

As Wonga left the room he closed the two narrow doors that swung together on loose hinges like the old-fashioned shutters on a long-deserted house. The wooden sliding-bolt was missing; so he let the doors swing loosely ajar.

"My ——," wailed Barclay, "I can't stand this!"

He stood in the middle of the room, in the dingy light, biting his nails, not daring to sit on the edge of the *k'ang*, revolted at the thought of food that had been cooked in that evil-smelling kitchen. Carson, for his part, despite his great bulk, took one nimble step upward upon the *k'ang*, and rolling into the comparative sanctuary of his cot, pulled a piece of mosquitoe netting over his head, and was ready for sleep. Lifting his hand to emphasize his final pronouncement, he said—

"If you had half an ounce of physical or moral courage, young fellow, you'd hop into that cot and sleep in comfort."

Barclay felt a squirming sensation within him, but he did not move. After a while Carson's regular breathing indicated that he had actually gone to sleep.

Taking his courage in his hands, Barclay after considerable hesitation, groped in the muck and litter outside the door until he found some stiff corn-stalks among which the hogs were making their bed. With these he improvised a wooden bolt with which to buckle the doors together. He thought that if any one attempted to force the doors, the crackling sound would awaken him. A gurgle of laughter made him whirl around.

"You don't suppose corn-stalks will keep out bandits?" asked Carson.

"They'll wake me up, anyway," said Barclay sullenly; "and—and give me a chance to run!"

He snuffed the light and crept into his cot, intending to remain awake. The blackness and silence of the night weighed heavily upon him. The atmosphere was musty and suffocating. He felt a tension as if a faint charge of electricity were running through him. For at least an hour he lay awake hoping some sound would break the silence. Suddenly Carson commenced to snore. Then a drum began to throb far off in the distance. Barclay sighed as the vibrations pulsed through the stagnant air. All at once, exhausted, he fell into a sound sleep.

At about two o'clock in the morning Barclay woke up. He had been in a very deep sleep. Suddenly he was wide awake, the hair riffling on his scalp.

Holding his breath, with his heart pounding suffocatingly, he turned very slowly on his cot until he faced the door. He strained his bulging eyes in the darkness but could see nothing. The heavy silence was unbroken. All at once there was a faint sound like the scratching of a mouse in an empty house.

The wooden hinges of the doors creaked almost imperceptibly. Softly, under increasing pressure, the corn-stalks began to crackle softly. Hypnotized with terror, Barclay lay trembling, with nerves so acute that he could actually hear the sound of breathing. The blood throbbed painfully in his throat. Forgetting everything but the frantic thought of self-preservation, he slipped out of his cot as if drawn forcibly by the fascinated glare which he kept fastened on the blackness of the doorway. Instinctively he gripped his stick which he had placed by the cot.

The stalks began to snap.

Suddenly the door burst open.

Lunging wildly on a level with his head, with the mad hope that by surprizing them he might clear a way momentarily and spring into the darkness, he encountered only space. Overbalanced, he fell forward. He was struck a heavy blow across the thighs, and sent sprawling in the muck, with a sharp gasping cry. He was bowled over—tramped upon—crushed! He thrashed out spasmodically, but his reeling mind was charged with an apprehension of death.

All at once, he realized that he was free.

Sitting up with a jerk, he found himself enveloped in darkness and silence.

A LIGHT flickered in the restaurant, and the wrinkled little head of the inn-keeper was thrust forward in a wavering yellow halo. At the same moment, Carson, aroused by the uproar, stuck his face from under the mosquitoe netting, and struck a match. These two glimmering lights were sufficient to illumine a ring of pigs' heads, with ears thrust forward alertly and little eyes glistening with fright; and Barclay in the center glaring at them wildly. He had been battling with the hogs!

"Some—some one was breaking in the door," Barclay stammered.

The little inn-keeper chirrupped breathlessly. Carson's match went out, and he fell back in bed roaring and gasping with laughter. Barclay, plunged in darkness once more, groped his way back to his cot, cursing bitterly; and without another word, buried his face in the crook of his arm, and tried to forget his mortification and misery in sleep. But he couldn't. The reaction kept him shivering; and every little while Carson would suddenly come to life with a wheeze—a breathless rumble—and then a roar of laughter that rasped on Barclay's nerve until he wanted to kill him.

At daybreak, while waiting for the carts to be loaded, Carson went over the whole combat in pantomime for the benefit of the inn-keeper. Barclay couldn't see the joke.

"Well," said Carson, suddenly serious, "you ought to find a bit of useful philosophy in it. When the fire and fumes of your imagination blow away, why you found that the monsters you feared were nothing more than pigs!"

"Oh, go to ——!" said Barclay savagely.

Throughout that day, however, whenever the younger man was inclined to show timidity or abhorrence, his chief would raise his hand with a solemn gesture, and murmur:

"Pigs, my boy! Pigs!"

Two days on a barrel-backed pony, which plowed along with its nose in a rut, and two nights on bug-ridden *k'angs* in loathesome inns with suspicious creatures scraping across the thin, ragged ceiling-papers just over his head, convinced Barclay that he was enduring the tortures of the damned. His mind went back to the girl whose taunt had driven him to make the trip, and he believed that he could joyfully throttle her on the same day that he throttled his big and cheerful companion.

The country was at its worst, and day after day it was the same; dust, vermin of great ferocity and variety, luke-warm tinned food, wailing children, embittered farmers whose crops withered by the roadside, ragged pitiful mothers, clamorous beggars who stumbled along beside the carts beating their foreheads against the hard ground, and over all an unblinking sun that scorched Barclay's face until it was as sore as a smothered boil. At the end of three days his legs were rubbed raw from the friction of saddle-leather and whip-cord riding-breeches.

Even Carson felt something of the physical hostility of the country, and the antipathy of the natives. His agents were polite but uncommunicative, and showed no interest in extending their business, generally offering as their excuse that their districts were on the verge of famine and it was impossible to make sales; but he could not help noticing in all the villages and the larger towns that the inhabitants received them sullenly. Small gatherings broke up at their approach. Ominous-looking placards were posted on the walls. Muttered curses even were directed at them. And once an old woman, coming upon them suddenly, promptly threw a fit.

Carson became irritable and thoughtful; but he never permitted Barclay the same luxury of complaining, because at the first word the big man's face would brighten with joyful recollection, and, raising his hand, he would say solemnly:

"Pigs, my boy! Pigs!"

One day they came to a tributary creek of the river that runs from Paotingfu to Tientsin. This river had to be crossed before taking the northward road to Chowchow. Carson, therefore, welcomed the opportunity of returning the ponies and carts, and hiring a cabin-junk to take them as far as possible.

The creek was not much more than a sluggish canal, but it bordered on old flood country, and stagnant water stretched away beyond both banks, turning the country from dusty-gray and brown to a more welcome pale-green. Endless plains of kaoliang, like slim shoots of sugar-cane, grew out of the subsiding waters, giving this district the appearance of a broad, featureless swamp of papyrus.

For three days the trackers, towing the junk behind them, crashed their way through the kaoliang, while Carson and Barclay sprawled under reed-awnings on the cabin roof, smoking cigarets to keep away the flies, listlessly reading to put themselves to sleep, or trying to keep their minds occupied with a dirty pack of cards.

The heat continued to pour down from the gaping sky in great pulsing breaths that smothered the good-nature of ordinary companionship, and brought into sluggish action all the fetid viciousness of man and earth.

The thick artificial jungle pressing in on all sides seemed the center of a sort of Sargasso Sea, for the heat shimmered wave-like over the far-reaching fields, and small water-snakes and turtles swam languidly in and out among the weeds. The lagoons and ditches and wet, hidden depths of the high-standing grain, laboring under the heavy sun, gave forth mists at night that swarmed with mosquitoes.

Barclay woke and dozed as if in a nightmare. Even Carson had not suspected that the country would be so thoroughly depressing and unhealthy. He had crossed this district himself in Winter on a *pitze*, when the grain had been levelled, and it was all one vast sheet of ice on which nothing could survive. Conditions now began to work on him in a curious manner. He became alternately liverish and frivolous.

Ordinarily a man of tremendous energy, the heat and confinement at first exasperated him, then made him lazy and careless.

On the other hand, probably through a sense of revulsion or an innate regard for orderliness, Barclay became more precise and careful in his habits as Carson became more slovenly. Nevertheless, when he was not angrily trying to rebuff Carson's bantering, he lapsed into gloomy silence, for every argument ended maddeningly with the same words:

"Pigs, my boy! Pigs!"

During these days the natives seemed to draw further away from their foreign masters. Liu remained buried somewhere in the cool depths of the junk, and the tracking coolies were too far away at the end of their rope for the foreigners to relieve their spleen on them. Wonga might have suffered, but his insolent grinning manner made both Carson and Barclay feel uncomfortably that he had them both somewhat at his mercy.

Carson had been in the habit of sleeping on the cabin roof in a light kimono until he came down one night with a chill. Exasperated, he literally devoured quinin until his head was splitting. On top of this he got another chill. Furious, he kicked the tiny medicine case away from the side of his cot, and it tumbled overboard.

"My ——!" cried Barclay. "You've lost our medicine!"

"To —— with it!" growled Carson. "It's a lot of junk anyway."

"You fool!" exclaimed Barclay wildly. "Haven't you got a grain of sense?"

With his head throbbing blindingly from the quinin, Carson rose awkwardly to his feet, and gripped Barclay by both arms.

"You white-faced little skunk, you, don't you call me a fool," he said savagely; "or I'll break your neck. Take that back now—right now!—or I'll —— well throw you overboard!"

Barclay's face was white as paper; his knees trembled; he licked his lips automatically, as he looked up at the piercing eyes and blazing face above him. He winced under the crushing strength of the hands upon his arms, stammering—

"—I didn't mean—but suppose we get sick——"

For a second the red haze of murder swam before Carson's eyes. No one had ever insulted him with impunity. The junk kept jerking forward against the sluggish current, the trackers bending to their work indifferent to what was happening behind. The rattle of a tea-kettle came from the depths of the boat where Liu and Wonga were holding a subdued conversation.

All at once Carson dropped his hands, shrugged his shoulders, and smiled.

"I'm sorry myself," he said. "I *am* a fool. This heat's ruining me. Forget it, Barclay!"

Barclay had tensed himself for a desperate struggle, and his relaxed nerves and muscles were jumping in a manner that made him ashamed and sullen. Without a word he stumbled down the ladder into the cabin, and flung himself on his cot cursing Carson bitterly as his rage smoldered and flamed, and died down again with a realization of his own cowardice. He should have struck at Carson in the first place, and taken a chance. Groaning, he hammered with his fist on the edge of his cot, for he realized that Carson would have had no difficulty in carrying out his threat, and flinging him overboard. Suddenly he sat up with a curse, gripping his knees frenziedly.

"By ——!" he said under his breath. "I'm going to get that fat buzzard! I'm going to get him, when he doesn't expect it!"

WHEN Wonga served dinner that night on a tiny table in the low-roofed cabin, Barclay had to make a continual effort to mask his revengeful rage.

Carson on the other hand was affable. His headache had cleared away, and he fell easily into a bantering mood. Barclay had insisted that the food be served steaming hot in covered dishes as a guarantee against contamination; and he took the further precaution of eating with one hand waving constantly across his plate to keep his food clear of flies. Carson promptly went to the other extreme in order to torment him by showing his scorn for such precautions.

He laughed at the flies, mixed his vegetables and curry in with his soup, and poured his coffee over his pudding. This night Barclay could not conceal his disgust.

"Well, my lad," said Carson with an air of good-humored superiority, "what's the difference? Now exactly what is the difference? People once thought it was vulgar to mash potatoes! Well, if the flavor's all right, what's the argument against mixing cocoa with oatmeal? The nutritive elements are exactly the same when they reach the stomach."

"And the flies lend flavor, I suppose?"

"Flies aren't dangerous unless you happen to be near a village, young fellow——"

"How do you know what dangers are scattered in that kaoliang?"

"Ah," said Carson, tilting his head back and beaming mockingly at Barclay, "only pigs, you know. Only little piggies!"

"—— you!" cried Barclay, pushing away from the table and rising to his feet, his voice breaking in a sob of futile fury. "You're acting like a pig, yourself—wallowing—there—in that muck!"

"What!" roared Carson, bringing his great hand down on the table with a crash that set the plates dancing.

Barclay stumbled backward with frightened dismay, keeping his large brown eyes fastened with fascination upon the red, swollen visage and blazing eyes of his big companion, until his groping hand touched the door of the companionway; then he turned and scampered up to the deck. Once out in the open air of night, he stood still trembling, almost ready to burst into tears of rage and self-disgust. Carson, in the cabin, raised his hand and drew it thoughtfully across his lips, murmuring profoundly—

"Eh—h-m-m-m!"

A few minutes later the junk bumped against a bank, and the trackers called back through the darkness that they had reached the main river, and a village lay behind the dike that rose above them.

Carson instantly forgot everything else in his eagerness to get on. Shouting for the boatmen to pole across the river and draw up by the village, he pulled on heavier clothing and laced up his shoes. By the time he had finished dressing, the junk had been secured and a plank run out. Dismissing Barclay from his mind, the big fellow went ashore with Liu to enjoy an evening pipe along the bank, and see if he could make arrangements for a cart and ponies to take them forward to Chow-chow, two days ride beyond. Feeling a bit groggy, he left Liu at the inn to complete the arrangements, and stumbled back along to the junk at about eleven o'clock.

Barclay had turned in early, and lay in a deep sleep which was not disturbed by the barking dogs, the continual chatter along the river bank, the piercing songs from the darkened village, the intermittent clatter of the watchman's rattle, nor even by Carson's noisy return.

Wonga had slipped away to find friends, and the boatmen were all ashore.

Groping his way into the cabin, a pit of darkness, where Wonga had placed his cot, Carson struck his head violently against a joist and almost dislocated his neck. Staggering to recover his balance, he drove the toe of his shoe under a beam-staple, and gave a muffled gurgle of terror, thinking something had closed its jaws on him. Then he lurched against the soiled-clothes bag—and clawed at it—and crushed it spasmodically, thinking it was a robber!

Finally he brought up in safety on the edge of his cot, but he was choking nervously, and a feeling of uneasiness was fluttering through him.

Through all this Barclay slept, evolving in his dreams schemes of violence against his companion. About one o'clock in the morning Barclay suddenly awoke.

A dead silence hung over the village. There was no sound except the gentle soughing of wind among the reeds on the opposite shore, and the *lap-lap-lap* of water against the junk. Barclay lay still, listening; then he caught his breath sharply.

Carson, in the next room, was breathing in gasps—and all at once a low moan escaped him.

Barclay felt the goose-flesh ruffle his whole body. Flattening himself against the wall, hardly breathing, with his heart pounding suffocatingly, he gave heed with all his senses. Thoughts of thugs, snakes, mysterious and awful danger, flamed in his head. There was no further sound from Carson. The wind whispered softly in the grain and the water gabbled gently under the junk.

All at once Carson called out sharply in a voice wrung with pain:

"Barclay! Wake up! Oh, Barclay!"

Barclay leaped out of bed as though he had been jabbed with a needle, and stood tensely in the dark, with hands outstretched, mouth agape, eyes bulging. The voice suddenly became lucid. Barclay relaxed, and began fumbling for matches.

He found Carson seated on the edge of his cot, with arms crossed tightly over his stomach, his heavy body contorted like that of a hump-back. As Barclay watched, he rocked slowly back and forth, breathing explosively with pain. After a while, puffing out his lips in a long collapsing breath, Carson untwined his arms, and, dropping them in front of him, with head hanging despondently, he sat there clasping and unclasping his hands.

"What's the matter!" whispered Barclay with a touch of awe.

"S-s-stomach!" gasped Carson.

Barclay gave an astonished titter of laughter.

"Are—are the nutritive elements tangled?"

Carson jerked up his head, with a swimming look at Barclay. The full firm face seemed to have sagged, and in the yellowish-light was putty color. He had removed his glasses, and the ringed eyes, thrown into shadow, were startling. Drawn by a spasm of pain, he ducked his head.

"Cholera!" he croaked.

The word struck into Barclay's brain like the soft thud of a sand-bag. His life seemed to be escaping from the tips of his toes and fingers. Staring blankly at the sagging figure before him, he felt his face become cool as the blood ran out of it. His jaws began to ache from the tensing tendons. Automatically he clamped his lips, and began to breathe heavily through his nostrils.

Carson whipped his arms about his middle again, and suppressed a sharp squeal. That squeal seemed to blow Barclay backward. He found himself clutching the jamb of the door, as though holding himself afloat in a turgid, steaming flood of germs. Carson lifted his head and looked at him again; and his open mouth was a sharp-edged pit.

In about five seconds Barclay found himself mysteriously alone on top of the dike, looking downward at the dark hulk of the junk. He was shivering and he felt very weak. For a couple of minutes he himself experienced one of the most marked symptoms of cholera—which is an apprehension of impending death. Summoning the pinch of courage that remained in him, he called faintly for Wonga—then for Liu—then for the boatman.

Only with the passage of time did he realize that the junk was empty of all save the convulsed figure of Carson. Carson was dying alone in that floating box—alone, without friends and without medicine. Barclay began to whimper. But what could he do? There was no medicine, since Carson himself had kicked it overboard. It was Carson's own fault. It was, in fact, a sort of suicide. There was nothing Barclay could do!

Fifteen minutes later Barclay was again standing at the entrance of Carson's cabin. He held a wet handkerchief before his mouth.

"What can I *do?*" he demanded plaintively. "What can I *do?*"

Carson said in a lugubrious tone—

"Get me some opium."

"Opium!"

For a moment Barclay thought that it was Carson's hope to defeat the pains of death, as Chinese criminals sometimes nullify the torments of the executioner, by eating opium. Then he remembered that it was, in fact, the prescribed medicine for cholera.

Without another word he groped his way frantically through the junk, scrambled up the muddy bank, and stumbled and slid down a slimy alley-way into the depths of the village.

Without much difficulty he found a medicine shop, made conspicuous, even in the gloom, by the great emblazoned signboards that hung from the roof clear to the ground. It was boarded up tight as a bandbox, and not a soul stirred in the streets. The silence and darkness were something more than distressing to Barclay. He rattled the shutters of the door a bit timidly. Then he hammered on them violently. The dead silence brought all his fears rushing on him once more. Frantically he increased the din, bowling out:

"Open up! Open up! It is a foreigner! I need medicine—quickly!—quickly!"

A whisper came from behind the walls of the neighborhood—

"It is a foreign devil!"

Dogs began to bark; the village watchman came down the alley-way, moving forward two steps boldly, then hesitating as the uproar increased. Voices called querulously from behind barred doors. At length there was a stir in the shop, and the whisper of anxious voices.

A panel slid open, and a round face, appearing in the gloom like a flat plate, marked with professional bone-rimmed goggles, was thrust slowly forth. When Barclay babbled his needs, the head withdrew with an indefinable expression of indignation; but presently it appeared once more, and a pudgy hand was extended. Barclay took the pink pellets, no larger than shrunken peas, paid for them, and ran stumbling back to the junk.

Carson had staggered weakly off the junk, vaguely feeling that he had been abandoned; then, unable to continue on into the village, he returned again to the lighted cabin. Barclay found him sitting there on the edge of his cot, his body slumped despondently. He looked up at Barclay with veiled eyes, and grunted—

"Oh!"

Barclay stood trembling in the doorway, his feet glued to the floor, refusing to carry him into the room. At length, bending forward and clasping his wet handkerchief tightly over his mouth, taking pinched little breaths through his nostrils, he placed a tumbler of water and a saucer containing the pink opium pellets on a stool beside Carson. Carson reached out his hand and began to put the pellets into his mouth—one, two, three, four, five!

With a strangled cry Barclay swept the remaining pellets off the stool—and they dribbled away through cracks in the floor.

Carson lifted his head again, as if with an effort; and Barclay went up into the open air of the deck, biting his nails and running his hands nervously through his hair.

"He was killing himself!" he moaned.

On the other hand, suppose he had not taken a sufficient dose?

Shivering, Barclay slumped upon the cabin roof. Shivering, he fixed his eyes on the vague outline of the shore with an expression of woe. Nothing broke the silence, except an occasional muffled sound from below. The sighing of the early morning breeze, the flurried whisper of the water, the uneasy stirring in the grain—slowly brought a soothing drowsiness to his exhausted senses. His head sank upon his chest. Though he struggled to keep awake, it sagged lower and lower.

WHEN he awoke the sun was up and there were sounds of life all about him—the *thump-thump-thump* of coolies' feet on up-stream junks; the long-drawn chants on passenger boats going down to Tientsin, sweeping over the brown current like driven Autumn leaves, kept in mid-stream by uloes swishing slowly back and forth like the tails of lazy pike; the calls and shouts and grunts of amphibious farmers pushing away from the bank in sampans to make their way to submerged fields of grain; the sudden wild quacking of a flock of ducks driven across the water by small boys beating the surface with long rods to startle the minnows.

It was market day, and from behind the dike came a confusion of sounds that could be associated with nothing but a Chinese country market—grunting cattle, shrill-voiced cursing drivers, the shriek of ungreased wheels on carts and barrows, the clang of gongs and the clack of rattles, a sudden fusillade of fire-crackers, the belching scream of hogs dragged by their feet to the slaughter block, a confused droning murmur that served to blend the sounds, and over all a heavy cloud of dust that seemed pregnant with every fierce emotion that pulsed in the human throng beneath it.

All about Barclay were the strident sounds of life. He sat up blinking his eyes, looking shoreward. Then the memory of the night's events rushed upon him. Overcome, he dropped his face in his hands and groaned.

The next instant he jerked his head up at the sound of Carson's voice—

"What's the matter with you, Barclay?"

"Eh—eh—eh— Thank God!" murmured Barclay.

"What?"

"How do you feel? Is it gone?"

"Yes-s-s. Oh, I guess I wasn't so bad!"

"But I thought cholera killed people!"

"I think it was just an ordinary cramp, after all," admitted Carson a bit shamefacedly; "or, rather, a culmination of upsets—quinin!—banged my head!—stubbed my foot!—lost my temper!—touch of the sun, maybe!—and a —— bad stomachache!"

"And the opium?"

"It fixed me up. Those pills haven't much in them, you know. The Chinese use them as a cure for addicts—you've got to use a lot to have any effect."

The two looked at each other in embarrassed silence, Carson with washed-out puffy face and weary, bloodshot eyes, and Barclay with a blank countenance that began to show sullenness and doubt. All at once Barclay blurted:

"Look here! You—you weren't *spoofing* me, were you?"

"No!" exclaimed Carson righteously, raising his hand in a gesture of denial. "No! Certainly not!"

Then the absurdity of the notion touched his sense of humor. A glint of amusement showed in his eyes, and a smile twitched at his lips.

Barclay sprang up, cursing furiously, and walked away, looking back occasionally over his shoulder, his face contorted and twitching. Carson was still a bit groggy; his amazement made him speechless. All he could do was stare after the young lunatic, with bulging eyes, and exhale one long explosive syllable.

Barclay jumped off the junk; but when he reached the top of the dike, he turned and yelled:

"I'm not through yet! Wait! You played on my sympathy. But—but wait, you fat buzzard! Next time, you'll rot before I'll raise a hand to help you!"

"Listen, Barclay!" Carson roared. But Barclay was insanely beyond reason.

"Next time," he repeated shrilly, "you'll rot before I raise a hand!"

"If you want to return to Tientsin," said Carson restrained by a sense of guilt, and all at once feeling that it might be best if he did return, "why don't you stay here? Some one will pick you up in a houseboat and take you down——"

"Houseboat!" shouted Barclay waving his arms frenziedly as he thought of the girl in Tientsin who had precipitated all his miseries by her remark upon the houseboat trip to Paotingfu. "No! I'm going to the end of this trip. I'm going to Chow-chow! But you look out, that's all!"

At this moment, Liu, who had returned to the junk at daybreak, thrust his head out from the cabin, and addressed Carson diffidently in English:

"Sir," he said, "I think it better not to go to Chow-chow."

"*You* think it better not to go to Chow-chow!" exclaimed Carson. "What the —— do you mean?"

"Yes, sir. I would not advise it."

"Who asked your advice?" demanded Carson dazedly.

"But I give it to you, sir! It is extremely rash and reckless to make the attempt."

"What!"

"Sir, I assure you!"

Carson shouted for Wonga. Wonga appeared, insolently braiding his heavy queue.

"Is there a road to Chow-chow?" demanded his master.

"There is."

"Liu says we ought not go to Chow-chow. Is it dangerous?"

Wonga glanced carelessly at the villagers crowding the bank.

"What place is not dangerous?" he said.

"Oh!" said Carson with an air of relief. "Well, then, get the luggage together, and we'll be off immediately."

Liu said nothing, but withdrew his head with a long sad sigh.

Two days later the two foreigners were riding side by side on jaded ponies. Their mental reserve had temporarily broken down. They swore at the heat, cursed the dust, and consigned the whole country, and the boy Wonga in particular, to a considerably hotter place; while poor Liu sweltered in the rear, dreaming dreams of Tientsin restaurants, and sighing plaintively.

Darkness had fallen on them like a cloud of Gobi dust. The short-legged horses stumbled over the sun-baked ruts of the neglected highway as if their hoofs were plough-shares. The lumbering country carts, whining wheel-barrows, and swiftly shuffling coolies that traversed the road by day from mud-village to mud-walled town and back again, had ground the surface into a bed of impalpable dust.

At every footfall it rose in heavy clouds like huge puff-balls bursting at a touch, filling the ears and eyes and nose with cloying particles. It seeped through the web of their clothing. It sought out every pore. It seemed to suffocate them.

The setting of the sun brought no relief from the heavy heat of midday; and the ponies, worn out by eighty *lis* of distance covered, hung their big heads as if feeling the way with their noses, wheezing painfully and snorting every few paces to clear their nostrils. Their hides were covered with a sticky coat of gray; the leather of the saddles was moist and slimy; and the webbed girths of camel-hair clung to their hides like sticking-plaster.

Wonga, in the cart, had vanished at dawn with bottle, hamper, and baggage. Whether or not they would ever find him again was purely a matter of conjecture. Liu rather suspected they would not; Barclay was —— sure they wouldn't; but Carson was still hopeful that if ever they reached Chow-chow they would find him comfortably prepared to meet them there.

All at once Liu gave a grunt, and halted. Carson and Barclay turned their horses slowly and looked back at him. Liu was standing in front of his horse, with his cap pushed back on his head, scratching his forehead, and regarding the animal with a mournful expression. The horse was standing with legs outstretched, head between his knees, breathing like a furnace.

"That settles that," said Carson. "We walk!"

Barclay murmured pathetically and tumbled sidewise stiffly into the dust. Swaying on his heels he winced at the very thought of taking a stride forward. But there was no alternative. Liu volunteered to follow slowly with the horses, while the two foreigners pushed on into the village.

They stumbled forward ankle-deep in dust, sometimes brushing against the wisps of sere, sun-scorched, grain-stalks that rattled at the touch, sometimes stumbling into dried-up irrigation ditches.

The country was remarkably still. The planets glistened like teeth, and the atmosphere suddenly began to grow cool, as night sucked up the heat of the earth. The few mud cottages along the road were deserted.

As they approached Chow-chow, this absence of inhabitants became more and more noticeable.

"We couldn't possibly have missed it?" Carson asked himself half-aloud.

"There it is!" exclaimed Barclay with sudden animation. "Listen!"

They had reached the top of a hillock, and paused for breath. All at once a loud uproar burst upon their ears.

Fire-crackers, cymbals, Manchu trumpets, and barrel-drums cracked and clanged and roared. Lights twinkled in the darkness before them outlining the low buildings of the town. Crackers burst over the housetops in tiny puffs. The smell of incense and black powder came floating down on the slow night breeze.

"It sounds to me like a battle!" said Barclay in a whisper.

"A wedding or a funeral," said Carson, laughing.

"All right," said Barclay, sitting down listlessly on an overturned mill-stone and huddling his arms around his waist, "you're elected. I'm not going to make a fool of myself again!"

He felt chilly and nauseous and more miserable than he had been for days. Having seated himself, he felt no further desire to go on. Carson looked down at him with a half-contemptuous laugh.

"Well, I'll go ahead, then," he said; "and when you feel strong enough—and brave enough—you can come on with Liu."

As he turned away the brief silence was broken by the shrill piercing notes of a Chinese song, like the irregular screech of a cracked phonograph-record, punctuated by the crashing of cymbals and the rattle of the drums.

Barclay lifted his eyes and looked resentfully at the disappearing figure of his hated companion.

As Carson advanced in the darkness, lighted only by the flicker of the bursting crackers, he soon found himself on the edge of the town. The irregular rutted main street was empty, and the gray and drab one-storeyed houses that fronted on it seemed silent and deserted. The whole interest of the inhabitants seemed to be centered on what was taking place in a clearing deeper in the town.

Puzzled, he continued on, but more slowly and with instinctive caution, until suddenly he came upon an open square lighted fitfully by castor-oil torches and globular isinglass lanterns painted with red characters. Surprized, he brought himself up sharply, keeping in the shadow until he could make out what was actually happening.

THE square was crowded with a shuffling, shoving, gawping crowd of farmers, laborers, shop-keepers, small boys, nondescript women, in all sorts of garments from blue-black silk coats to tattered denim and thin cotton breeches. The dim light increased the effect of a large crowd, with faces all turned in the same direction. There was an old temple there.

In front of the temple, some shaved-headed *bonzes* in dirty gray robes were mingling with men of a type Carson had never seen before.

They were stripped to the waist, revealing powerfully muscled bodies. Standing firmly with feet placed far apart and arms curved rigidly forward, they were plainly athletes. As if to confirm this, there were great dumb-bells on the ground about them—lifting-weights of mill-stones balanced on heavy poles. But they wore tight black turbans; and their faces were black and scowling beneath them. Their bodies were streaked with grime and sweat, and blotched with reddish bruises as if they had been wrestling among rocks.

Thinking it was some curious rite he had never happened to witness before, Carson was about to step out of the shadow and shoulder his way through the crowd in order to get a closer view when his eyes suddenly discovered a row of heavy pikes, tufted with red horsehair near their keen-edged tips, which had been placed against a wall within a short distance of where he was standing. The light shone on them; and he saw that lower down some modern rifles and bandoleers filled with cartridges were stacked with the primitive weapons. This display of armament gave him an extraordinary feeling of sudden peril.

It was obvious that the athletes had only just laid their weapons down, and were preparing for some ordeal.

Suddenly one of them leaped into the

open space, with a great red-balled heavily spiked mace in his hands.

Striking an attitude, he gave a sharp panting scream of defiance and commenced whirling madly through the steps of a warrior's dance. Oddly shaped banners with flaring characters were lifted up by the *bonzes*, adding splashes of scarlet and orange to the barbaric setting.

With a sharp pounding of feet the dancer suddenly became rigidly motionless. A second scream burst from his throat; and the orchestra emphasized the cry with a startling crash of discordant notes.

Catching his breath, and quivering from head to foot, the dancer began to shout in panting accents that whipped him into a state of frenzy scraps of the recitative song that was to become famous as the rallying song of the Boxers.

"The foreign devils have come from a vile place
To eat up the territory of the Heaven Born!
Invoking strange demons, they work magic
Over the mutilated bodies of our children——"

A murmur of anger rose above the crowd. The Boxer stung them to fury with a screech:

"Drive all barbarians from the Celestial Realm!
And kill! Kill! Kill! Kill——"

The Manchu trumpets blared like buffaloes. *Crash!* went the cymbals. The barrel-drums roared and rattled.

One of the villagers stepped forward excitedly, shouting:

"True! That is exactly so!"

Round and round in the wavering yellow light the moist figure of the Boxer again spun, his flaring eye-brows emphasizing his facial contortions, his smooth muscles moving like the yellow bands of a snake. Twining his mace like a flexible bar, he struck in all directions, slaughtering imaginary foes, shrieking and screaming obscene and blasting curses.

Fascinated, and not yet realizing the meaning of the murderous song, Carson moved forward unconsciously until he was almost on the edge of the outer circle.

Again the Boxer halted, quivering. Again he shouted:

"They have caught our souls in little boxes
And have stolen our children for medicine!
Hellishly they contrive to stop up the sky;
And the dusty earth pants for vengeance——"

The murmur among the crowd became an incoherent roar. The Boxer ended his song breathlessly:

"Death can not touch the brave— So say the gods!
Therefore kill! Kill! Kill! Kill——"

With a final spin that sent the scarlet sash that encircled his waist whipping upward like flame, he leaped in the air and came to an abrupt stop, his body perfectly rigid, feet far apart, arms crooked tensely by his side, lips tightly compressed, chest and throat swelling with suppressed emotion.

A lean *bonze* stepped out from the crowd by the temple stairs. In one hand he held an old-fashioned blunderbuss, bell-mouthed and crudely made. In the other he carried a cupful of black powder and a saucer of lead slugs.

The *bonze* was primed for a theatrical speech, but the essential drama of the situation was too obvious even for his vanity to ignore.

He shouted in a rising shrill voice:

"We have already plumbed the heavens and gaged the vibrations of the earth! Brothers! All has been made clear! The waters will bring forth the myriads of the Sea-quelling Duke; the mountains will deliver the legions of K'ang Hsi! As for the foreign devils, their fate is sealed! They are blasted!"

The crowd pressed forward, absolutely silent yet trembling with curiosity.

"Whoever prostrates himself before the war-gods," cried the *bonze* carried away by his own excitement, "the guardians of heaven and earth, and performs the loyal salutation, for him are the sacrificial vessels set; but he can not die! He is invulnerable! Whoever fights the foreign devil with the fire of faith and the sword of hate can not die! He is invulnerable! These are not idle words. They speak the incontrovertible truth. Behold!"

At this moment, the Boxer, swelled beyond all proper physical proportions by the intensity of his excitement, seemed to explode in one frightful scream:

"*Tcha!*— Kill!"

Carson's large frame shook at the sound as if he had been stuck in the stomach with a knife; yet he stood there, hypnotized.

The *bonze* instantly took the blunderbuss in one hand, and with a sweeping motion poured the black powder loosely into it, dropping the lead slugs deliberately on top.

The Boxer's complexion had become the color of old tallow; but his attitude did not change by the quiver of hair, except that his eyes were fixed scowlingly upon the bell-mouth of the blunderbuss. There was a sudden oppressive silence.

The *bonze* brought the blunderbuss up to his hip, Chinese fashion, covering the bare stomach of the fanatic. There was a general quivering intake of breath. Carson, overcome by excitement, moved forward another step taking him out of the sheltering shadow.

A blast of flame leaped from the blunderbuss with the smothered *whoof* of a loose explosion. The Boxer vanished in a cloud of black smoke; but as the cloud thinned out, he appeared again. He had not moved. Except for the rush of color back to his suntanned skin, not the slightest change could be seen.

"Good God!" exclaimed Carson dazedly.

At that instant his eyes fell upon the figure of his runaway servant, Wonga, squatting in the front row of spectators with an alert and delighted expression on his countenance. Brought back by this discovery to the peril of his position, he took a step backward, and his foot came down heavily upon the knuckles of a beggar.

"Ai! Ai! Ai!" yelped the beggar, like a kicked puppy. "Ai! Ai! Ai! Foul foreign devil——"

At that shrill cry amid the uproar that had followed the proof of invulnerability, twenty faces turned sharply and discovered Carson. In a panic of terror Carson tried to spring into the shadow he had left; but his foot slipped and he went sprawling on his face.

Spasmodically he twisted over, half-rearing; while the villagers, being country folk, broke away from him, leaving him plainly exposed to the view of the Boxers. In a flash the Invulnerable One saw his opportunity. Leaping at the prostrate man, he swung his spiked mace over his head as lightly as a millet flail.

At the sight of that face, and unable to avoid the blow, Carson realized that his end had come. Closing his eyes, with a feeling of extreme weariness and nausea, he wilted beneath the impending shock of pain and extinction.

But the Boxer stopped with a loud "*Houf!*" flinging himself backward to overcome his momentum.

The slim figure of Barclay, vibrant with the intense thrill of hand-to-hand combat, had stepped out from the shadow and confronted him over Carson's prostrate body. The Boxer's hands were drawn back over his head, wielding the mace. Barclay's hands were also drawn back over his head, but instead of a mace, he held one of the heavy pikes poised and ready for striking.

"Why," he exclaimed with cool amazement, "it's that filthy Tientsin 'ricksha coolie!"

The Boxer's muscles twitched as his presence of mind returned, and he attempted to strike sidewise under Barclay's pike. With a sharp intake of breath, Barclay drove the pike with all his strength clear through the naked body.

As the body collapsed with the heavy pike wrested from Barclay's hands and protruding from two sides, for a moment the young foreigner went mad. Scrambling among the rifles, he seized one and commenced firing wildly straight into the crowd, shouting between shots:

"Invulnerable! Invulnerable!"

The crowd broke and scattered like flitting shadows; the *bonzes* flew up the stairs and into the temple; and the Boxers dived into the shelter of darkness. Carson, scrambling to his feet, was dazed and badly shaken; but as his mind cleared and he understood the situation, he too seized a rifle and commenced to shoot.

Exhilarated, wild, Barclay suddenly insisted on shooting up the town.

"No! No!" exclaimed Carson shakily. "For God's sake, Barclay, let's get out of this! They'll get over their surprize in a minute—and they're bound to catch us! You don't understand the danger!"

"Pigs!" cried Barclay. "Just little piggies!" And he burst into shrieks of hysterical laughter. In another minute he was calm, and his common-sense got the better of his impulse.

Destroying the surplus rifles by removing the bolts, they smashed the pikes, and retreated into the darkness along the road they had come.

Two hundred yards beyond the outskirts of the town, they came upon Liu slowly walking toward them drearily leading the refreshed horses. The three immediately mounted and pushed their horses southward.

WHEN the sun once more came up out of the Yellow Sea it found the three huddled behind the mounds of a family burying-ground. The utterly spent ponies had been left many *lis* behind to become the property of the first who dared claim them.

The three men had carried nothing with them except a rifle apiece and bandoleers of cartridges. Carson sat chewing desperately on the stem of an empty pipe. Liu was gazing drearily into space. Barclay was interesting himself in a search for dandelion shoots which he dug up with concentration and ate with satisfaction.

"Barclay," said Carson suddenly, "how the —— did he do it? That gun was aimed straight at his stomach!"

"Old stuff," said Barclay without raising his head. "Buffalo Bill's Indians do it in his show. The powder's loose, so there's no force at all behind the lead.

The excitement of the night, and the natural transition between misery and daring, had brought a marvelous change in Barclay. His painful sunburn had passed the turning point and was deepening into an even tan; his torn soiled clothing clung familiarly to his slim figure with picturesque effect; and his timid spirit in response to new and startling demands had become cheerful and bold. Carson, used to adventure, was solemn and depressed. Lui was in the depths of dejection.

All morning they remained among the high grave mounds following the shadows, chewing grass and dandelion shoots to stay the pangs of hunger, and listening to the distant tumult in the hamlets scattered over the hot plain. The very appearance of the country proved that the excitement had become general.

There were no workers in the fields, and the few passers-by along the dusty roads travelled lightly and in great haste, some toward Peking on sleek mules and single-footing ponies or in closed carts with outriders and mounted pikemen; some on foot with pikes and bows and arrows, journeying southward toward the marshes along the river that flowed to Tientsin.

During the heat of noon, when the usual silence fell over the country, and the natives, despite the extraordinary excitement of the time, dozed, Barclay suddenly stood up and stretched his arms.

"All right," he said, "now's the time. Let's go."

Dodging hamlets and villages, hiding in groves and behind neglected wayside shrines taking advantage of every burial-ground and dried-up irrigation ditch, they at last reached the edge of the marshes just as the sun was sinking. Here in the dusk they ran into a small nest of Boxers, and fought their way clear, retreating deeper and deeper among the sodden reeds until they were hip-deep in water.

In the gathering darkness there was nothing to do but continue on, hoping to reach the dike that marked the channel of the river where they could steal a sampan and pass down by night to Tientsin. The kaoliang reeds pressed in on all sides, and the orange glow of a rising moon was their only guide.

As Barclay paused to tear off a stalk of sweet kaoliang to chew, suddenly he hissed:

"Listen! There's something behind that screen of reeds!"

The only sounds to break the stillness of the marsh were the faint stirring of waterfowl and the sigh of the evening breeze.

"Ducks," said Liu, whose mournful thoughts were all of food.

Holding his rifle high in the air, Barclay took a step forward, lost his balance, and, reaching out for support, seized a cold slimy root. Floundering around for a more stable footing, he burst through the screen of reeds from behind which they had heard the waterfowl.

There was a sharp stifled scream.

Instantly the three recoiled, sinking up to their necks for concealment. In the gloom they made a terrible picture—three sun-scorched touseled heads, apparently floating on the green scum, with bloodshot eyes stairing wildly at a common point.

As their eyes became accustomed to the deeper shadow beyond, they were able to make out a sampan in which three figures were huddled, staring at them with eyes that gleamed whitely even in the darkness.

"Oh, my ——!" gasped a voice. "This is —— positively ——!"

Barclay bobbed up half-out of water.

"Mrs. Tyndal!" he cried. "Fat Mrs. Tyndal!"

There were three hysterical exclamations; suppressed screams of recognition; and a babbling torrent of speech, as Carson and Barclay surged forward.

When the hysterics were over, breathless explanations followed.

Fearing trouble at Paotingfu, the party had turned back in their house boat before reaching that city. They had almost reached the large town of Sheng-Feng when the crew deserted at night taking everything of value they could lay their hands on. The men of the party had then attempted to navigate the junk, but after passing Sheng-Feng, they had got lost in a blind canal, and were fired upon with increasing boldness by the natives. One of the men was slightly wounded in the shoulder, and as there seemed no other way to progress, they decided to take to the country roads, traveling by dark.

The next day they were attacked by a large force of genuine Boxers, and were compelled to find safety in the marshes. That was yesterday—and here they were! One of the men had started off for Tientsin to try to get help; and the other two, Mr. Tyndal and a retired British major, had been absent all afternoon reconnoitering for a safe way out.

"Well," said Barclay pulling at his ragged mustache, "you've found it. *We* are the safe way out! Have you got anything to eat?"

Some lumps of unleavened Chinese bread were produced, and the men ate them ravenously. Carson was first to finish. With his mouth still full he said decisively:

"We'll have to move on. The best thing to do is to drag the sampan to the river, and start floating it down to Tientsin——"

"No!" exclaimed Barclay vehemently. "We'll not go down the river. They'll be watching every foot of the banks!"

"We'll go in the dark."

"We won't go at all! That ends that!"

"Well, look here—" began Carson angrily.

"You'll go where I say," shouted Barclay with sudden fury, "or you'll go alone. If you start to interfere with my plans, I'll blow your —— fat head off!"

Carson looked at the contorted face with amazement. Then he remembered that heavy pike driven unhesitatingly through the Boxer. He remembered the wildness with which Barclay had insisted on shooting up the entire town of Chow-chow. And he realized that in a moment of madness Barclay was quite likely to do what he threatened. Raising his hand in a gesture of renunciation, he murmured agreeably—

"Eh—h-m-m-m-m!"

After a moment of self-communing, Carson added querulously—

"But, Barclay, what *do* you propose?"

"We'll get to dry ground below here as fast as possible; and then we'll strike in a straight line for the railroad from Peking to Tientsin. There are bound to be soldiers patrolling it!"

WITH PUTTING their weapons in the sampan, the three men began the weary business of finding their way out of the marsh. In half an hour they ran across Tyndal and the major, waterlogged and groggy, trying to make their way back to the sampan. After a brief conference, dominated by Barclay, they agreed to his plan, and the party turned eastward.

An hour after daybreak, they were discovered by a band of mounted infantry, ordered out from Tientsin to attempt to get in touch with refugees from ill-fated Paotingfu. That brought an end to their misery.

It appeared that the renegade Wonga had actually reached Tientsin, with three wounds in his body, and reported the plight of his masters to the foreign authorities.

"That's marvelous!" exclaimed Barclay.

"What an adventure you've had!" said the commander.

"Not so bad," said Barclay.

"But the excitement—the danger—the glory!"

"Not so bad," repeated Barclay confidentially, "until we met the women. I hate that sort of responsibility. I'm glad they're safe. What are you going to do now?"

"We'll send a small escort with you back to the railroad. I intend to push on with the rest to see if I can reach Paotingfu."

"Oh," said Barclay thoughtfully. "Well, I've had enough walking. Could you let me have a horse to ride?"

"Why, yes. Certainly."

"Good!" said Barclay brightly. Turning to Carson he added: "Then I won't be able to relieve you at Tientsin after all. I'm not going back."

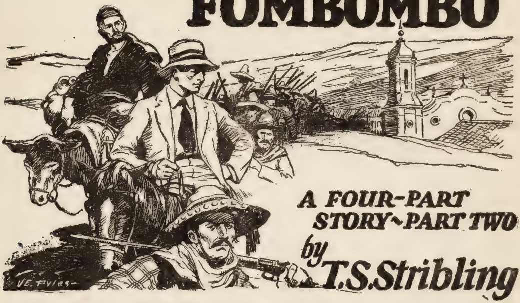
"Why not?" cried Carson and Miss Tyndal in one breath.

"I've decided to go to Paotingfu," he said, with a conscious grin. "I prefer to be with the soldiers."

FOMBOMBO

A FOUR-PART STORY-PART TWO

by T.S.Stribling



Author of "The Web of the Sun," and "Green Splotches."

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

THOMAS STRAWBRIDGE, salesman for an American firearms company, faced the American consul in Caracas, Venezuela, and declared—

"The fellow who pulls slick stuff in a business deal has hit the chutes for the bowwows."

Yet ten minutes later, when Strawbridge had been apprised that the selling of arms and ammunition in Venezuela was illegal, he was on his way to General Adriano Fombombo, President of the revolutionary State of Rio Negro, with an address and a recommendation slipped into his hand by the consul at their farewell handclasp.

Strawbridge realized his inability to find the address—an ancient usage has given the name to the street corners instead of to the streets—and enlisted the services of the diffident young bullfighter, Felipe, who nonchalantly led the way to a blue-fronted house.

The door was opened by a negro.

For some minutes the negro played the rôle of ignoramus until satisfied that Strawbridge was not an agent of the Government, then introduced himself as Guillermo Gumersindo, editor of *El Correo del Rio Negro* at Canalejos, the seat of Fombombo's Government, whither he offered to take Strawbridge.

"When do we start?" asked Strawbridge, thinking of a huge order of rifles from the revolutionary general.

"When you feel like it, *señor.* Now if you're ready."

The same afternoon Gumersindo, Strawbridge and Felipe started for the northern province in the editor's automobile.

Once inside the free and independent territory of Rio Negro Strawbridge beheld the fruits of Fombombo's dictatorship in the form of a huge canal to connect with the Orinoco being dug by filthy and ill-nourished prisoners, known as "reds." They crowded about the machine. One of them hung over the side and begged:

"*Señor*, I had a pretty daughter, little Madruja. I meant to give her to Esteban for his wife, but the *jefe civil* broke up my home and sent me here. *Señor*, are you going to Canalejos?"

Felipe put in:

"I will find your Madruja, *señor*, and care for her as if she were my own. Do you give her to me?"

"*Oh, sí, sí. Un million gracias!*"

Along the entire way to Canalejos Strawbridge expounded the virtues of American democracy, to which Gumersindo replied that they were pleasant enough theories, but that in Venezuela the Government, because of the unreliability of the peons, had to be a dictatorship. The practise was amply illustrated after Strawbridge's meeting with Fombombo at the gate of Canalejos. Waiting to enter behind them was a peon on horseback.

"What are you doing on that horse, Guillermo Fando? Is it yours?" asked Fombombo.

"*Sí*, your Excellency," replied the man.

"Take it at once to my cavalry barracks and deliver it to Coronel Saturnino. A donkey will serve your purpose."

The peon obeyed.

As the party neared the Plaza Mayor they saw a crowd gathered about Fombombo's house waiting for the performance of a legal wedding ceremony. Felipe, discovering that the bride was little Madruja and her affianced, Esteban, halted the ceremony in the name of her father. Madruja—a tall panthress of a girl—was sent by Fombombo to his house—where Strawbridge was also to be a guest—to await an investigation.

Evening brought the meeting of Strawbridge

"Fombombo," copyright, 1923, by T. S. Stribling.

with Fombombo's household—his tiny Spanish wife in her Carmelite nun's habit, taken to fulfil a vow for the recovery of her sister, and Coronel Saturnino, who explained the intentions of Fombombo for the expansion of Rio Negro finally to include all Venezuela, the first step to be an attack on San Geronimo, for which campaign Strawbridge enlisted.

Strawbridge, whose enthusiasm had been fired by the vision of a big order for rifles, went to bed with nothing having been agreed upon by Fombombo.

Next morning in the street Felipe, drunk and outraged, poured out to Strawbridge the tale of the abuse he had suffered the night before. He had gone to the general's house to serenade Madruja, whereupon Fombombo opened the window and called:

"Sing to us, Felipe. As to your paternal duties, your ideas went out of date with the Neanderthal man five hundred thousand years ago."

Laughing, Strawbridge excused himself and went on toward the cathedral where he met Gumersindo, but not until he had called upon a hardware store and discovered that because the populace was taxed heavily at any sign of prosperity, their business methods were hopelessly antiquated.

XI

NOTWITHSTANDING Mr. Thomas Strawbridge's apt and well-timed quotation from one of the best of the American business poets, still he left the cathedral on his way to the *Presidencia* in a shillyshally mood. He went out of the side entrance of the church as the most direct route. The glare of sunshine struck his eyes rather uncomfortably after the gloom of the church. Just outside the door a dense flowering hedge delimited the Plaza from the garden on the other side.

The drummer felt for his case and drew out a cigar to settle his thoughts on his proposed interview with the dictator. He stopped to scratch a match when he heard voices talking just inside the garden. They were low voices, a man's and a woman's, but their passionate undertones caught the salesman's attention. He could understand little of what they were saying, but occasionally the woman lost her poise, or her caution, and he would get a phrase or two; then he could hear the man mumbling. Once the woman whipped out—

"You are mad, you are insane, Pancho!"

The voice of the man seemed to admit this. Later she gasped, "But you can't do that—he's alive!" and after another interval, she cried out:

"What a monster! I despise you as I do him. You are a *bribon!*"

This speech was stopped abruptly as if a hand were laid over the woman's mouth. Came sounds of some guarded physical struggle, then a slap, a little cry and the sound of running.

The woman's restrained cry went through Strawbridge with a queer effect. He tried to peer through the dense hedge, but could make out nothing more than the fact of movement on the other side. He tried to follow their running, but somehow he lost them. A moment's reflection told him they had separated.

For some reason the incident gripped the salesman in a queer way. He reasoned if the two had separated one must have gone back into the church and the other toward the small postern at the end of the garden. So he started walking briskly in this latter direction.

Just as he stepped into the thoroughfare between garden and palace he saw a woman in a nun's costume hurry out of the little side gate, cross the road and enter the side entrance of the big State house. With a breath of surprize Strawbridge recognized the Señora Fombombo.

He found it difficult to attribute such an adventure to this small, quiet woman in her severe religious garb. And yet she had almost run from the garden gate to the *palacio.*

The American pondered this but at last decided that the *señora* had been coming from her music practise in the cathedral and some quarreling, fighting couple in the garden had frightened her. The drummer walked quickly to the little postern and looked into the garden for the disturbing couple, but of course they too had had time to escape.

Strawbridge loitered outside the side entrance of the *palacio* for some minutes, finishing his cigar and thinking over the incident. His last idea was undoubtedly correct. And since some outrageous couple had annoyed his hostess he himself was annoyed.

He thought as a guest in the *palacio* he ought personally to see that his hostess passed through the garden unmolested to and from her music practise. Determined on this line of action, Mr. Strawbridge threw away his cigar very decisively and walked up to the side door of the State house.

The drummer's intention to ask for the *señora* at once was somewhat disturbed by the fact that the griffe girl admitted him when he rang the bell at the side door.

As the American stepped into the entrance a little, leather-colored soldier in uniform came briskly forward with his rifle at attention. A word from the griffe girl established Strawbridge's right to enter.

"The *señora*," continued the griffe girl, giving Strawbridge her knowing look, "is in the music-room."

She paused a moment and added—

"That's her now."

The thing which the maid called the *señora* now was the chromatic scale played with great velocity.

The griffe girl was so insinuating that Strawbridge thought of denying he had meant to see the chatelaine at all, but he changed this to something about believing he would go hear the music. Instead of producing the casual effect he had hoped for, this statement set up a brightly intelligent smile on the griffe girl's copper face. As Strawbridge walked down the transverse passage to the main corridor to turn up toward the music-room he could feel the eyes of both the maid and the guard watching his back.

The drummer passed two more guards in the main corridor and presently paused before the door whence issued the runs and cadenzas. As he was about to tap he was again seized by the same inexplicable hesitancy which afflicted him whenever he came near the *señora*. It was an odd thing. He knew that she was just inside the dull mahogany panels, but somehow the door seemed to shut him out completely. He felt he would not get in.

He tapped uncertainly with a conviction that it would accomplish nothing. But it did accomplish something. It stopped the music so suddenly that it startled him. Then he awaited in a profound silence. Strawbridge imagined that the *señora* knew that it was he, and by this long silence she was showing him that she did not want him in the music-room. A painful humility came over Strawbridge.

After all, he thought, she had a right to dislike him. Every time she saw him he was dull and embarrassed. Queer how she crabbed his style! Now at home, back in Keokuk, he was rather a cat among the skirts, but here——

The drummer's good-natured face sagged in a mirthless quirk.

Well—he might as well go away. The *señora* would never know what a jolly friend she was missing, for he was jolly when one took him right, he simply was jolly. And he would never know her either.

It was neither of their faults, he saw that. She simply crabbed his style. He couldn't help it; she couldn't help it. A faint sense of pathos floated through the drummer's mind, and he turned away from the door.

AT THAT moment it opened and the *señora* stood looking at him. She had just had time to walk across the room from the moment he tapped.

Both man and woman looked at each other in utter surprize; but in an instant this expression vanished from the *señora's* face, and she asked him would he like to come in and hear her play.

The drummer moistened his lips with his tongue and explained vaguely that he had just been passing and had heard the piano——

He was so patently, so painfully ill at ease that the girl said she too had been lonely that forenoon and was wishing some one would come in. She indicated a chair near a barred window; then, wearing the faint, mechanical smile of a hostess, she went back to the piano and asked what he would have her play. Mr. Strawbridge said—

"Just anything lively."

The *señora* pondered and began a mazurka. It was a trifle of thematic runs. She began rather indifferently, but presently her fingers or her mood warmed and she did it with dash and brilliancy.

At first Mr. Strawbridge's mental state prevented him from listening at all, but gradually the richly furnished room, the murals on the ceiling, the black ebony piano and the slender, nun-like player all reformed themselves out of original confusion. Then Mr. Strawbridge became aware of the music.

He did not care for it much. The *señora* did not jazz the piano as Mr. Strawbridge craved that it should be jazzed.

It should be explained perhaps that Mr. Strawbridge's contact with music had been confined almost exclusively to the Keokuk dance halls. He was, one might say, a musical bottle baby who had waxed fat on the electric piano.

Now he missed that roaring double shuffle in the bass and that grotesque yelping in the treble which he knew and admired and was moved by. Mr. Strawbridge classified the *señora* at once as a performer who lacked pep.

The girl continued filling the stately room full of dancing fairies; presently these exquisite little creatures rippled away into the distance, the last far-away fairy gave a last far-away pirouette and the music ceased. The *señora* turned with a faint smile and waited a moment for her guest to say he liked the mazurka, but finally was forced to ask if he did.

"Well, y-e-s," he agreed dubiously; he liked it. Then with animation—

"*Señora*, do you play 'Shuffle Along'?"

She repeated the title after him evidently trying to translate it into intelligible Spanish.

"Who wrote it, *señor?*"

She turned to a big music-rack which apparently held the music of the world.

"I don't know," said the drummer naively. "Maybe you've got 'My Ding-Dong Baby'?"

Mrs. Fombombo began going through the huge music cabinet uncertainly.

"You don't know the composer of that either?"

"No. How about 'Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes'? Or have you got the 'Haw-Hee Haw-Hee Toddle'?"

The *señora*, who was a methodical woman, began alphabetically with Brahms and looked for the "Haw-Hee Haw-Hee Toddle." Strawbridge got up from his chair and came to assist.

"Let me help you," he volunteered. "I know the backs of them pieces just as well as I do my own face."

The *señora* glanced at him.

"Do you play?"

"A little," admitted the drummer. "I have been known to ripple my fingers over the elephant's tusks."

Strawbridge laughed pleasantly at this tiny jest. It was the first time he had been able to speak a single sentence in a natural way to the *señora*. Now this small success pleased him.

"Play me the kind of music you like," invited the *señora* at once. "I don't recognize the English titles. Perhaps I have them after all."

"Oh, all right."

He smiled and sat down on the old-fashioned piano-stool. He looked at the *señora* with a pleased expression on his handsome, good-natured face. Then he popped his left fist into his right palm and his right fist into his left palm to warm up his finger action.

"Now this is the rage," he explained with a faint patronage in his voice. "This is what runs 'em ragged in New York," and, lifting his hands high, he boomed into "My Haw-Hee Haw-Hee Baby."

Mr. Strawbridge did not see the *señora's* face during the opening bars of his jazz, and therefore had no means of determining her moods and tenses. When presently he looked about at her, she was much as usual; her black eyes a trifle wider perhaps, her smile a little less mechanical.

"I've seen a thousand people on the floor at one time toddling to this," he called to her loudly above his demonstration.

The *señora* pressed her lips together; her eyes seemed fairly to dance, and she nodded at this bit of information.

Mr. Strawbridge realized that he was entertaining the *señora* highly. He had never seen her look so amused. He had not thought her especially pretty before, but just at this moment she gave him the impression of a ruby with the dust suddenly polished off and held in the sunshine.

The drummer was very proud of the fact that he could play the piano and talk at the same time, and he always did this.

"Say, I like the tone of this machine," he called out in a complimentary way. "She's hitting on all six cylinders now."

The *señora* smiled. The aptness of the drummer's metaphor got inside of her. She laughed outright in little gusts with attempts at suppression. It was as if she had not laughed in a long, long time.

Mr. Strawbridge wagged his blond head to the clangor and syncopation of his own making.

"Coming down the home-stretch," he yelled, pounding louder and faster. "Giving her more gas and running up her timer!"

He threw his big shoulders into the uproar.

"Going to win the allcomers' sweepstakes! Go on, you little old taxi! Go to it! Bow! Bang! You're it, kid! The fifty-thousand-dollar purse is yours!"

HE STOPPED as suddenly as he had begun, reached in his vest pocket, fished out a cigar band and with a burlesque courtesy offered it to the *señora* as the sweepstake prize he had just captured.

The *señora* produced a handkerchief and wiped her eyes, then drew a long breath. She looked at the drummer with her face dimpled and ready to laugh again.

"I never saw anybody like you," she said with perfect frankness.

"I knew you'd like me if we ever got acquainted," laughed Strawbridge. "You nearly scared me stiff at first."

"Yes, I noticed it. Why?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Strawbridge offhandedly. "Some women a fellow's scared of, and some he ain't."

"Have you no theory?" she asked, beginning to smile again.

"Why no-o. You are scared or you ain't scared. I'm all right now." He spoke as if he were recovering from an attack of typhoid.

"But what was there about *me* to frighten any one?" she persisted with a Spanish woman's instinct to make an opening for a compliment.

Strawbridge looked her frankly up and down.

"Why, I don't see a thing," he declared. "It's just like I say—there's no sense to it."

The *señora* opened her eyes a trifle and studied Mr. Strawbridge.

"Well, you really are the funniest man I ever met," she said soberly.

"I knew you'd like me," repeated Strawbridge confidently. "Nothing like music to get folks acquainted."

Señora Fombombo began smiling again, her very brilliant smile.

"Yes," she acquiesced, "it is one of the shibboleths of culture."

"Why—yes, I suppose so," agreed Strawbridge.

He became soberer. The phrase "shibboleths of culture" had sobered him somewhat. It was not the sort of phrase an American girl would have flung into a gay conversation, at least not without making some sort of face or saying it in a burlesque tone to show it was meant to be humorous. It plunked into the drummer's careless mood like a stone through a window.

"By the way," he said on this somewhat soberer plane, "let me tell you why I followed you here into this music-room."

"Did you follow me?"

"Yes."

"Where from?" she asked in a different voice.

"From the garden."

The mirth vanished from the *señora's* face as if some one had turned down a lamp. It left her again pale, delicately engraved and not very pretty.

"May I ask why you followed me?" she questioned slowly.

"Sure," said Strawbridge with the same protective impulse stirring again in him. "I was coming out of the cathedral and I heard some roughneck couple raising a rough-house over in the garden. I came on to the *palacio* and saw you come running out of the gate. I knew they had frightened you with their yelping, and it made me mad.

"So when you go to the cathedral again just tip me off, please. I'll go along with you, and if any of these toughs scare you, I'll—I'll make 'em think the cathedral had dropped on their heads, see?"

Mr. Strawbridge's blue eyes narrowed; his well-formed nostrils expanded a trifle. He must have looked rather handsome to any woman, even to one whom he was not offering to protect.

The *señora* stood leaning over the end of the piano studying him intently.

"That is very kind, and—and it's a very unexpected kindness, Señor Strawbridge. I am very grateful——"

"Don't thank me at all—do the same for any woman. And say, that reminds me what I was balled up about."

"Balled up? What do you mean, balled up?"

"Oh—" with a little gesture— "I don't know what to do. It's a matter of business."

"Are you bringing me a matter of business?"

"Sure. Why not? You've got your ideas."

She continued looking at him curiously.

"Well, what is it?"

"It's about your husband. I consider that he runs this country on the most unbusinesslike basis I ever heard of."

The Spanish girl opened her eyes still wider at this astonishing turn.

"Unbusinesslike——"

"Sure. It's like this."

And Strawbridge proceeded to explain what he knew of the dictator, who had told him, and how he thought the general was losing money.

During the recital he was surprized to see the *señora's* pale face grow paler still. Finally she gasped—

"And does he take property, too?"

"Why, good ——!" cried the drummer in amazement. "Didn't you know that?"

Came a long pause, and the Spanish girl said almost inaudibly—

"No, I didn't know—that."

"Huh!" ejaculated Strawbridge, growing very embarrassed.

"I'm sorry I mentioned it. I—I—"

He looked at her, moistening his lips and broke out with a desperate note of remorse—

"Well, I swear I hate mentioning that."

The *señora* shrugged wearily.

"Oh—*that* doesn't matter."

She kept accenting her "thats" as if other things preyed more deeply on her thoughts.

At this moment a big French motor-car murmured past the window of the music-room. It happened that both the drummer and the *señora* saw it, were looking straight at it.

The car contained General Fombombo, and in the seat beside him Strawbridge recognized the peon girl, Madruja, the little bride whom the dictator had detained in the *palacio* overnight until he could come to some judicial decision as to what to do with her.

XII

THE passing of General Fombombo by the *palacio* window with the peon girl, Madruja, will inevitably call to the philosophical mind the vast difference between the moral standards of civilized America and barbarous Venezuela. In America no man, not even the most degraded specimen of our race, would think of parading his mistress before his wife. Such things aren't done in America.

Many homilists have read into the term civilization an amelioration of questionable morals. A more exact definition might be: Civilization is a slow breeding-up in the civilizee of an overpowering impulse to conceal his shortcomings and to present to the world an innocuous and an inoffensive front.

Some moralists are prone to put down to hypocrisy this flowering of the great Anglo-Saxon cult of concealment. Nothing could be shorter of the truth. Hypocrisy is an effort to deceive, but the best English and American types deceive no one. Their intention is not to deceive but to keep life clean, pure and enjoyable for their fellow men.

But here is the peculiar thing about vice. A man's own shortcomings never appear censure-worthy, whereas the sins of other men are hideous. To be seen openly sinning is to make oneself a public nuisance.

The genius of the Anglo-Saxon realizes this, and he avoids paining and distressing others by performing his dalliances and peculations as privately as possible. This secrecy is each man's private contribution to the comfort and reassurance of his fellow citizens. Taking us all in all, perhaps America's greatest gift to the world is peccadillos of low visibility.

As an instance of the deplorable effect of being seen, take the passing of General Fombombo and Madruja. There was Thomas Strawbridge, gay and happy in the society of Señora Fombombo until the passing of the French car destroyed his pleasure. Yet all the time he had known from Rubito the actual state of facts.

It had seemed humorous when Rubito told the story, but the sight of the dictator and the peon girl passing in the car was not humorous at all. On the contrary it was oppressive and painful. It ended abruptly his *tête-à-tête* with the Spanish girl. Indeed, it hung about him for days, popping up every little while with disagreeable iteration.

The incident upset Strawbridge's own code. It caused him to doubt the rightness of any husband deceiving any wife. He had never before thought even of questioning such an arrangement.

He had known many drummers, married men, who when they got to the cities would take a little flyer. It had seemed perfectly all right, a sort of joke. Now abruptly it all seemed wrong, and he was vaguely angry and ill at ease.

And the personal end of the affair puzzled him. He could not understand how any sane man would run away from so delightful a girl as Dolores Fombombo to the over-accented and uncultivated charms of a Madruja.

He tried to put himself in the general's place, to fancy himself the husband of Dolores. Would he betray her? Would he deceive the confidence of so dainty a creature? Indeed no! The very thought filled him with a most unusual and tremulous tenderness. Why, before he would break faith with Dolores—before he would do that——

He got out a cigar, bit off the nib with a snap and lighted it in vague anger. He continued pacing up and down his room from one barred window to another, looking out at the river, at the gloomy prison called "La Fortuna," at the back of the cathedral.

Then his thoughts veered away from the general's infidelity, and he began thinking about a queer thing which had happened to him a day or two past, when he went to call on the proprietor of Sol y Sombra. This time he had found him in, and a very odd thing happened. He decided he would mention it to Dolores; perhaps she could explain it.

The decision to see Dolores and tell her this thing in his mind comforted Strawbridge somewhat. He drew an eased breath, went over to the window, reached through the bars and tapped off the ash of his cigar, then walked out into the corridor, turned toward the rear of the *palacio* and passed out through a back entrance on to a sort of piazza. The word "piazza" is used here in its ancient sense of a roofless paved space used to front a church or building of state in order to give perspective to its architecture.

Naturally the "piazza" in the rear of the *presidencia* was of no such heroic size. It was not more than forty feet wide, and it extended from the building quite to the edge of the take-off which led down a long, steep slope to the yellow river.

On the western end of this piazza projected the kitchen of the *palacio*, and it was littered on that side with unsightly bags of charcoal, chicken feathers, bundles of kindling, bones and other rejectæ from the cooking-department of the palace. This litter increased or decreased according to the spasmodic energy of the griffe girl, the wrinkled old hag and three or four other familiars of the kitchen. When these duennas were induced to purge their premises they simply shoved the refuse over the edge of the piazza and allowed it to distribute itself as it would down the long slope.

Strawbridge dragged out a chair on the eastern side of the piazza and sat down to his cigar and the sunset. This had grown to be his custom every late afternoon.

Until the *señora* joined him he was more attentive to his cigar than to the sunset. But when she came, her arrival, oddly enough, seemed to open his eyes to the fact that the sunsets in the Orinoco valley are famous for their brilliant coloring and dramatic effects.

He had finished perhaps a third of his cigar when he heard a servant come dragging the *señora's* chair behind her. This ended a faint suspense in Strawbridge. He looked around, and the two of them smiled at each other the satisfied smiles of friends who had been anticipating just this pleasure of watching the sunset with each other.

For the first evening or two they had talked dutifully all the time. Strawbridge had exerted himself to amuse the *señora*, but of late they found long silences mutually pleasant. So now as the *señora* came up Strawbridge simply remarked that he thought they were going to have a nice sunset.

The *señora* smiled privately at this characterization of the sunset seen from the piazza, those metropolitan clouds glorying above the endless llanos and reflected in the great river—"nice." Strawbridge was perpetually amusing her.

The drummer himself was immeasurably content. He sat watching the change and play of that huge and airy mansionry of vapors. Somehow it reduced him and Dolores to two little human midges seated behind a little palace, in a tiny piazza in microscopic wicker chairs. It sent a shudder of pleasure through him, they were so very, very small, and so very, very comforting, each to the other.

AS THEY sat staring at the vast chromatic architecture, a faint breeze brought him the malodor of the kitchen at the other end of the piazza and stirred him out of his reverie.

He looked around.

"By the way, *señora*, a queer thing happened to me the other morning. I've been meaning to tell you about it, but I never can think to when I'm with you."

"Yes?"

"About that clerk at Sol y Sombra."

"I don't know whom you are talking about."

"That little chap who put me wise to business conditions in this country. You remember what a row he raised because

I wanted to make a hardware display."

"Yes, that's Josefa. What about him?"

"Well, he's gone."

The *señora* moved lazily in the gloom to face her companion.

"You wanted to tell me Josefa was gone"?

He could tell by her voice that she was smiling.

"Not so much that as the way I heard it. Day or two ago I called on the proprietor. He was as polite as pie, but he didn't warm up to my selling talk. Finally I offered him my leader, some shovels at a price that 'ud make him think he stole 'em. I was pushing the goods pretty hard when finally he looked at me with a sort of whitish face and says—

" 'Señor Strawbridge, I am not in the market for your goods at any price.'

" 'That lets me down,' I says, 'if low prices and high quality don't interest you. That's all I got—the lowest prices and the highest quality.'

"I saw he was going to bow me out regardless, so I thought I would be polite up to the limit and inquire after the health of the little clerk I had met in the store several mornings before that.

"When I asked after him, the proprietor jumped from his chair,

" '*Señor!*' he cried. 'You can not mock at my distress! You may have the leading hand now, but as sure as there is a God in heaven, He will punish you!'

He shook a finger at me.

" 'He will punish you! He will punish you!'

"I stared at him. I never came so near hitting a man in all my life, but I remembered something my old man told me when I first went to work with him.

" 'Strawbridge,' he'd say, 'keep your temper; nobody else wants it.'

"So I thought to myself, 'Here's where I keep her,' and I said: '*Señor*, you've got the advantage of me. If I've done you or yours any harm, I'm sorry, but how have I done it?'

"He looked at me as keen as all you black-eyed folks can look.

"Don't you know where Josefa is?" he asked.

" 'Certainly I don't, or I wouldn't have asked where he was.'

" 'Well—he's not here any longer.'

" 'I'm sorry to hear that. What went with him?'

" 'He simply—went away.'

"The man's tone sounded queer to me. I looked at him puzzled.

" 'Did you discharge him?' I asked.

" 'No.'

" 'Is he sick?'

"The merchant looked at me, and I be —— if they wasn't tears in his eyes.

" 'Señor Strawbridge," he said in a heavy voice, 'Josefa is gone. He is simply gone. He was a good boy—that is all I can say to you about it.' "

Here Strawbridge's narration was interrupted by a little sound from the girl in the darkness. He stopped short.

"Why what's the matter, Dolores?" he asked in surprize.

"Oh nothing—nothing——"

Her voice quavered.

"Poor Josefa!"

The salesman tried to peer into her face.

"What are you saying, 'Poor Josefa!' about?"

"Oh Tomasito, everything is so horrible here—so terrible— Oh— Oh——"

And suddenly the *señora* began weeping, a pathetic little figure in her nun's costume.

Something clutched the drummer's diaphragm. He leaned toward her.

"Dolores! Dolores!" he begged. "Little Dolores! What's the matter? Have I done anything?"

One arm crumpled about her face. She stretched the other toward him.

"Oh, no, no; you've done nothing to me. I—I thought I was getting used to it. I—I used to cry all the time when I f-first came h-here. I—I thought I was growing hard, b-but I suppose I'm not."

The drummer was tingling at the appeal in her attitude and in her hand, which had caught two of his fingers. He wanted to pick the whole of her daintiness up in his arms and comfort her; but the general, the general's order, his American house depending on him for business, kept him seated and merely stroking her slender fingers.

"For God's sake, Dolores, what do you mean?" he begged.

The girl collected herself, drew a long breath and gently freed her hands.

"I will tell you," she said in a low tone. "Th-there, sit closer please so I can talk in a low tone. Don't make any noise."

Strawbridge adjusted his chair silently and sat staring at the slight figure in mute speculation. His head was full of the wildest conjectures—Josefa was her brother maybe—Josefa had followed her over from Spain——

"You say you never heard of Josefa before?" he asked aloud.

"No, I never did."

"Then why in the world——"

She made a weary gesture.

"Oh, Señor Strawbridge, because life is all of a piece here; every part has the same terrible quality!"

"But you don't know where Josefa is?"

"*Sí, sí, señor*, indeed I do!"

"Then where is he?" asked Strawbridge, more bewildered than ever.

Came a little pause. The girl pointed silently through the gloom.

"Right yonder," she whispered.

Strawbridge turned, half-expecting to see the little monkey-eyed clerk behind him. But the piazza was deserted, and he saw nothing more than the low, heavy walls of the fort against the last umber light in the east.

"What do you mean?" he asked, still looking for something else.

"I mean—the prison, *señor*."

A cold trickle went over the drummer.

"You don't mean that little clerk's in prison?"

"*Sí, señor*."

The drummer stared at her.

"For God's sake, why? What did he do?"

"Nothing *señor*, except——"

"Except what?"

"Except talk to you, *señor*."

She whispered this last in a rush which ended in a gasp, and this told Strawbridge she was weeping again.

The big drummer watched her distress miserably.

"Talked to me!"

"Because h-he t-told you about President F-Fombombo's methods."

The American turned to look at the prison again with a queer sensation.

"O-O-Oh— I see— Well, I be ——!" he uttered in slow stupefaction.

"And that is nothing—nothing," accented the girl passionately. "There are scores, scores in there—the maimed, the tortured, the sick, the dying. They have filthy crusts to eat. Never a physician or a priest. When they die the guards throw them into the river to the alligators. Oh, Señor Strawbridge, somehow God will punish this terrible place.

"Why, listen!" she whispered. "At night Father Benicio sleeps in the cathedral where he overlooks the river and the prison. When any noise awakens him and he sees the guards throwing something into the water the priests go to the altar and say the mass for departing souls."

The American shook his head as he stared at the prison.

"Merciful God!" he said in a ghastly whisper.

PRESENTLY she began telling Strawbridge her sensations when she came from Spain as General Fombombo's bride and found herself amid such a reign of terror.

"It was like stepping into hell, Señor Strawbridge. There never was a woman so miserable as I. I was afraid to confess such awful things even to Father Benicio, but at last I did. He was the only human soul to whom I could turn. Good, kind Father Benicio, he saved me from going mad."

As she finished her story the American's optimism returned.

"Maybe I can do something about this," he said thoughtfully. "I never have talked to General Fombombo about his business policy, but I really must now. I'll start in about Josefa. I'll show the general how the boy meant no harm. I'll get the boy taken out, then I'll show him how his policy as a whole is bad for business——"

"Why, Tomasito!" interrupted the *señora* in alarm. "Don't do that, it won't do the slightest bit of good."

"Sure it will if I can show him it's money in his pocket——"

"Dear Tomasito," she warned earnestly, "it won't help at all."

"Not if I show him it's bad business?"

"Tomasito, the general doesn't care that about business!"

She snapped her finger.

Mr. Thomas Strawbridge smiled in the darkness.

"That's where you don't know men, Dolores," he assured her from his wider knowledge. "Every man cares about business. Why, that's all there is to care for!"

"Oh—Oh—Oh, Señor Strawbridge. All there is to care for!"

The drummer arose in the darkness.

"Why, sure; business, business. There is no man on earth that isn't wrapped up in some sort of business. Well, I think I'll step inside and see what I can do."

He patted her hand again where it lay on the arm of her chair. There was something about its softness and littleness that sent a queer, sweet sensation up Strawbridge's arm and suffused his body. The next moment he moved into the *palacio* with his usual quick, rangy strides.

XIII

WHEN Thomas Strawbridge entered the library of the *palacio* he found only Coronel Saturnino, who was working at his desk; and near the entrance stood one of the palace guards. The silence was almost complete; Strawbridge could hear the faint scratch of the *coronel's* pen as he toiled at his endless preparations to seize San Geronimo.

The drummer was on the verge of calling out to know the whereabouts of General Fombombo when it occurred to the American that this Coronel Saturnino was at that moment devising plans upon which quite possibly his own safety depended.

It was rather an extraordinary thought for the salesman. There was something dramatic about it—a man working silently in the great, still library determining whether Strawbridge should live or die. And there stood Strawbridge, near the door unable to assist in the slightest degree in this determination of his fate.

It was a queer, almost a ghostly feeling. Somehow it clothed Coronel Saturnino with a kind of awesome superiority. A sort of premonition of the raid on San Geronimo came to the drummer, a charging of horsemen, sword-thrusts, the flashes of small arms——

Strawbridge's visualization was based largely upon a cheap chromo called "The Fall of the Alamo" which had hung in the parlor of his home in Keokuk. In this picture the artist had been very liberal with blood and dead men. Strawbridge decided not to call to Coronel Saturnino, but to allow him to work undisturbed.

The drummer nodded the guard to him. The little brown man glanced around at the *coronel*, then moved silently toward the American evidently with scruples. When he was close enough Strawbridge whispered—

"Where is the general?"

The little man was amazed at such a question.

"*Señor*, I am a guard, not a spy."

The salesman was faintly amused.

"Aw, come now, what's the big idea? You know me. You see me every day around this joint. So spit it out, man. Where did the general go?"

The little fellow shrugged, pulled down the corners of his mouth and moved silently back to his post.

This irritated the American. He told the guard under his breath to go to ——, and that faint explosion sufficed to wipe the incident from his mind. He turned out in the corridor again and walked toward the front of the building in an aimless search for the dictator while his thoughts returned to the *señora* and the misfortunes of the little monkey-eyed Josefa.

He began composing a speech against the time he found the general, a kind of sales talk designed to set Josefa free. He would say the little clerk had not volunteered the information about General Fombombo's business methods. That had been wrung from him by the fact that he, Strawbridge, was about to arrange a hardware display.

From this point of departure the drummer hoped to proceed into a constructive criticism of the general's whole dictatorial policy. It might do a lot of good, probably would. He was making the general's problems his problems, and now he rather thought he had solved one. He could fancy the general looking him straight in the eye and saying—

"Strawbridge, by ——, I believe you've hit the nail on the head!"

As a matter of fact the drummer knew the general never used profanity, but somehow he placed this blasphemy in the general's mouth because it sounded strong and admiring, as one frank, manly American curses at another when his admiration reaches a certain low boiling-point.

The drummer walked slowly down the corridor listening at each door as he passed, but he reached the entrance of the palace without hearing the general's voice.

Strawbridge came to a halt near the guard at the entrance and stood wondering what he should do. The injustice of Josefa's imprisonment spurred him to do something.

He stood looking below him into the

plaza, which was ill lighted. A rather large audience was collecting, for it was concert night. The semiweekly concert of the firemen's band would begin in about half an hour. A thought that he might find General Fombombo in the audience sent the drummer down the long flight of ornamental stairs into the plaza.

In the park was a typical Wednesday-evening crowd such as were gathering in all the larger towns in South America. Near the band-stand were a high stack of folding chairs, and peon boys hurried among the audience renting these chairs at two cents each for the evening. Dark-eyed *señoritas* in *mantillas* and fashionable short skirts chose seats under the electric lights where they could cross their legs and best display their well-turned calves and tiny Spanish feet.

The greater part of the crowd preferred to walk. They moved in a procession around the plaza, the men clockwise, the women anti-clockwise, so the men were continually passing a line of women and *vice versa*.

There was an endless tipping of hats, tossing of flowers and snatched phrases. Here and there an engaged couple strolled about the square together. To be seen thus was equivalent to an announcement.

The drummer was walking among this crowd, glancing about for the President, when a hand touched his shoulder. He looked around and saw Felipe, the bull-fighter, with a peon companion. This peon was a youth who wore *alpagartas*, but the rest of his costume had the cheap smartness of the poorer class of Venezuelans who trig themselves out for the Wednesday-night concerts. In contrast to his finery, there was something severe, almost tragic, in the youth's pale olive face.

"This is Esteban, *señor*," introduced the *torero*, reaching back and settling his wad of hair. "You remember him—Madruja's lover, who is half-married to her. That makes him the demi-husband of a demi-monde."

Strawbridge extended his hand, rather amused at the oddity of the introduction.

"*Caramba!*" ejaculated Felipe. "Do you smile at a man in distress, *señor?*"

The drummer straightened his face.

"Oh, no, not at all. I am glad to meet Señor Esteban. By the way, I was just out hunting General Fom——"

Esteban lifted a quick hand.

"*Señor,*" he cautioned in an undertone, "it is not wise to speak that name in a public place such as this."

Strawbridge glanced around, rather surprized.

"I was saying no harm; besides he's a friend of mine. In fact I was looking for him to ask a little favor."

"Yes?" interrogated Felipe.

"It's about a youngster named Josefa. The general put him in prison——"

"*Diablo, señor!*" gasped Esteban. "I beg of you not to speak of these things in the plaza!"

THE drummer was impressed at the peon's alarm. This feeling was reenforced by the knowledge that Josefa was in prison on account of just another such a casual conversation as this. So he said—

"Well, now you know what I had to tell you and who I am hunting."

The bull-fighter nodded gravely.

"I see you are going to do a certain friend of yours a little favor."

"Yes, get him out of trouble."

The *torero* turned to his companion.

"You see, Esteban, he is an *hombre muy simpatico*, but very indiscreet. Do you know what he did to me in Caracas? *Caramba!* I was standing on the street-corner watching some domino-players. Every one knows that the domino-players are the police's own stool-pigeons. *Ca!* I was standing there watching them when this *hombre* comes along and roars in my ears—

" 'Where is the *casa* where the great revolutionist, General Adriano Fombombo, lives?'

"I almost fainted. I could see myself rotting in the Rotunda!"

"He has a lion's heart," declared Esteban.

"And a donkey's brain," retorted the bull-fighter.

Strawbridge had heard enough of this.

"With your permission, *señores*, I will continue my search."

"But don't you want to look at the crowd, *señor?*" suggested Felipe. "There, look at that small young officer with the swagger-stick. Perhaps you know him?"

The drummer looked at a sharp-featured young officer with dark circles of dissipation under his eyes.

"No, I don't know him."

"You don't know the Teniente Rosales?"

"No, I never heard of him."

Felipe gave the drummer a side glance.

"It is not a bad idea to say you don't know him at any rate."

"Why, I don't!" repeated the drummer strongly, looking around at the bull-fighter in surprize.

Esteban interrupted:

"You see, Felipe, he is far more discreet than you gave him credit for. Perhaps he recognized *you* on the street corner of Caracas."

The bull-fighter looked at Esteban and then at Strawbridge.

"*Caramba!* I never thought of that!"

This conversation was getting too cryptic for Strawbridge.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said, "so once more, with your permission, I'll go."

He turned to leave his companions. Felipe interrupted:

"Wait; we're going in your direction ourselves. Come on, Esteban, we might as well have pleasant company."

"Oh—all right," agreed the drummer, rather surprized at this.

The three men drew away from the crowd and for some distance walked in silence. They directed their course along the shadowy parts of the plaza and then to the adjoining streets. At last Felipe said with a casual air—

"We hear you have joined the cavalry, *señor*."

"For the expedition against San Geronimo," qualified the drummer.

"You are a military man, no doubt?"

"No, not at all."

The bull-fighter seemed surprized.

"Are you going as a simple private?"

"Well—y-es—" hesitated Strawbridge with the complete reason of his going floating unsaid in his mind.

"No doubt you wish to make friends with the common people, the peons, the griffes, the mestizos, who make up this forsaken country, *señor*, and who are not of the pure Castilian blood as Esteban and I."

Strawbridge could not see whither this conversation was leading. He said very honestly—

"Naturally I want to make friends with every one."

"We thought so," nodded the *torero*. "We observed how you speak to all persons, great and small, how you stop on the street to give moral advice even to the lottery-ticket venders, how you sympathize with the unfortunate Josefa and say conditions should be changed. Yes, you certainly are very careful to make friends with every one."

Strawbridge was surprized that the bull-fighter had such a complete digest of his most trivial acts. Also, here and there in Felipe's tones flickered an insinuation of some hidden meaning which annoyed the drummer.

"Look here!" he said frankly. "What are you driving at? You know I rode from Caracas with you. You know I'm selling firearms to the general and hardware to anybody else."

"*Sí, señor*," agreed Esteban politely. "But why should you seek to make friends with this fellow and that fellow, the lowest and the meanest?"

The drummer grew a little irritated.

"I want to make friends with everybody. In the long run it will be of advantage to my house."

"Your house?" from Esteban.

"I mean the commercial firm I work for."

The two peons nodded thoughtfully. Esteban observed—

"A lottery-ticket vender who can not afford clothes for his nakedness will hardly buy guns and hardware——"

The salesman was growing weary of these innuendos.

"Look here," he said in a perfectly friendly voice but with a disagreeable content as is sometimes used by Americans under these circumstances, "I don't give a —— what you fellows think. I can't explain every look and word by my business. I'm friendly because I—I'm just naturally friendly. I call a man who isn't friendly a —— fool.

"Here I am walking with you two guys. I don't expect to sell *you* guns and hardware either, but I'm walking with you just the same."

He looked at both of them after this little speech. Both were obviously and entirely unconvinced. They shrugged slightly: "*Pues, pues! Bien! Ca! Seguramente!*" and walked slowly on, evidently in deep thought.

PRESENTLY Felipe broke the silence.

"*Señor*, you will pardon me. We knew all the time you were telling us the precise truth. What I said was by way of jest. Esteban, there, misunderstood, because he is a little dull.

"There is just one other little point Esteban does not understand, and I confess it puzzles me a bit, too. But I will not ask it if you are angry, *señor*. Perhaps after all we would better talk of other things. I think you have lost patience with your two poor stupid friends."

"No," denied the drummer, rather ashamed of his little outbreak. "I haven't lost patience, but you don't seem to believe what I tell you."

"Oh, *sí, señor;* yes, we do!" chorused the two earnestly.

"*Caramba!* We would not think of doubting a *caballero's* word!"

"Well, then—what's your question?"

"*Exactamente* this. You are not a military man?"

"No."

"You are going to fight at San Geronimo as a trooper?"

"Yes."

"You came here to sell hardware?"

"Yes."

"Then—I am very stupid—but why do you fight?"

"Can you sell hardware to dead men on a battle-field?" added Esteban.

Strawbridge looked at his questioners with a misgiving that he would never make them understand the true situation. They would never realize the necessity of learning the complete details of a customer's business. He began talking very carefully, as if he were explaining a lesson to a child.

"I am joining the raid on San Geronimo to get a working idea of my patron's business conditions."

Felipe nodded.

"Before I sell a market I like to know it thoroughly."

"*Precisamente.*"

"Before I sell a man a tool, I want practical first-hand knowledge of just how he is going to use it, what he needs, why he needs it—that's the American method."

Launched on his favorite theme, Strawbridge's voice was picking up a certain fervor.

"But why is that, *señor?*" puzzled Esteban. "If you sell a man anything it is his. He has it. You have sold it."

"Sh—let him explain!"

"No, that's a good question," declared Strawbridge with enthusiasm. "I sell you something. Why am I concerned about how you use it? Because the use of that article is your problem.

"But perhaps with my expert knowledge I can show you how to use it better, or perhaps I can devise a way to make you a better tool. Then you will be a satisfied customer, and a satisfied customer is the best advertisement in the world."

Strawbridge shook his fist.

"When you buy anything from me, gentlemen, you are not buying just my goods, you are buying human service!"

He popped his fist into his palm.

"You are buying the best in me to cooperate with the best in you, and between us we'll make this world a better world to live in—" he shook his fist and nodded sharply—"see?"

The drummer paused. The bull-fighter and the peon looked at each other. After several seconds had passed Esteban said—

"For example, *señor*, if I wanted to buy a dirk to cut Felipe's throat you would come and cut it first to see what kind of knife I should use?"

Strawbridge was a little cooled.

"Well—that is just about the size of my San Geronimo trip, isn't it? You seem to have hit the nail on the head."

Esteban became thoughtful.

"So you are going to aid—" his voice sank—"General Fombombo."

"Yes, sure I am."

"And it makes no difference if *he* is right or wrong. You will help him steal my Madruja, steal Señor Fando's horse, steal Señor Rosario's ranch, put Josefa in irons, do this, that and the other, break our bodies, destroy our souls, cut us down and grind us like corn in his mill. It makes no difference to you, you are going to help him in all that!"

Strawbridge was shocked at this sudden attack on the moral end of his business by the peon who had lost his sweetheart. He became more carefully logical and less rhetorical. In fact he was exploring new ground, a territory over which his old man had not coached him, so he was not so sure of himself.

"It's like this. I'm doing my part of this thing in a business way. If everybody would work in a business way there wouldn't be any of this rough stuff you're talking about because that's bad business.

"In fact, I was just on my way around to see the general. I'm going to get Josefa turned out of prison, and I think I can stop all this other sort of thing. I believe I can put this whole country on a business basis."

"But you yourself are going to San Geronimo to help kill men just to show him how to work his guns!"

Here Felipe interrupted in a disgusted tone:

"Esteban, you fool, just because you lost your Madruja your head is hot and you see nothing in the light of reason. This tale Señor Strawbridge told us is the tale he tells the general and makes *him* believe it. By this means he goes to San Geronimo with the cavalry. *Caramba!* I am amazed that even a stupid peon should not see so simple a thing!"

Esteban stared and grinned faintly.

"*Ca!* He told it so cleverly that even I believed it too!"

Strawbridge looked at his companions.

"What'n the —— are you talking about?" he demanded.

Felipe held up a finger.

"Everything is well, *señor*," he nodded confidentially. "You are a much deeper man than I thought. Everything is as you would wish it. In only one way would I caution you——"

"—— if I know where you are heading in, but what do you want to caution me about?"

"It is this, *señor*—you will take it as a friend—we are brothers now—it is this. When our country became so bad under General Dimancho that it could go no further we appealed to General Miedo for aid, and he promised us if he won power we would have justice; that every peon should possess his wife and daughters and property in peace, *señor*, precisely as you say."

Strawbridge stared at the bull-fighter with the greatest astonishment.

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Nothing; nothing at all, *señor*—but General Miedo forgot his pledges when he reached power. He forgot his pledges as men are prone to do, and our country became even worse than when it was under General Dimancho.

"So we went to General—" Felipe dropped to a whisper—"to General Fombombo, who had a ranch down on the Orinoco near Ciudad Bolivar. And *he* promised our deputation if we raised him to the highest seat our wives and daughters and property should be our own. Señor Strawbridge, the monument to General Fombombo that stands back there in the plaza marks the spot where he stood General Miedo up before his soldiers and shot him through the heart."

A gooseflesh feeling brushed over the drummer.

"Felipe," he said, "what in the —— has this got to do with me?"

"Nothing, *señor;* nothing at all. I merely mention this by way of information. You want information. All Americans want information. They want that the most badly of all the things they need.

"Also there is a saying in Rio Negro, *señor*, that a gray-eyed man shall free us. And we have tried our own people so many times, *señor*, and so sorrowfully, that we are weary of trying Venezuelans, and would fain try a man of another nation—you."

Strawbridge was dumfounded. He could do nothing but stand and stare at his companions. At last he made an effort and said in a queer voice—

"Men, you've got me wrong—you've got me completely wrong——"

"*Seguramente!* You are a salesman of hardware, who goes to war to show the dictator what knife cuts a throat best."

Felipe laughed briefly.

"We do not know what throat you mean to cut first, *señor;* you are a deep man; but here we part for the night. This building on your left is the west wing of the *palacio.* In those lighted windows you will find the general with Madruja. You said you wished to find him. There he is.

"I do not know what you wish to say or do to the general. I will not ask. You say yourself that you are a *maestro* in the cutting of throats. No one knows when or where you may see fit to give a lesson."

Felipe laughed.

"Remember, Felipe and Esteban are your friends. *Adio' hasta mañana.*"

"*Adios,*" returned Strawbridge.

THIS two companions turned and moved away toward the plaza. In the distance the firemen's band had struck up a sensuous Spanish waltz.

The drummer stood meditating on the

amazing thing Felipe had told him. Such a usurpation was as remote from Strawbridge's temperament as the stars; nevertheless he was profoundly moved.

For some reason the Señora Fombombo came into his mind. He saw her as clearly as if she stood before him in bright day. He put her vision from him, stared resolutely at the brightly lighted windows across the dark street.

In an effort to bring his mind back to his own affairs he drew out his silver cigar-case and lighted up. He tipped up his face in order that his eyes might escape the smoke. Out of the heavens a thousand brilliant stars offered him counsel.

Presently Felipe and his insurgency faded from his mind. He finally sifted down the exact problem which he had to meet. Should he go over and ask for Josefa's release and extend to the general his views on the proper business methods to be used in Rio Negro?

Should he go now? That was his problem. An American caught in such circumstances would probably be in a dour mood.

On the other hand the thought of the little monkey-eyed Josefa lingering out another night in the filthy dungeons of La Fortuna filled Strawbridge with pity and remorse. The youth was entirely innocent, and he, Strawbridge, had put him in his cell. On the other hand a badly timed interview could very well be of no service to Josefa and also lose the drummer a two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar order for rifles.

He wondered what his old man would advise him to do in this emergency. The drummer looked up at the stars and sought advice just as earnestly as any religious martyr would have prayed to these same heavens. If Strawbridge knew what his old man would suggest, he would do it.

The coal on Strawbridge's cigar glowed and faded at long intervals, and presently there struggled up out of the drummer's subconscious a memory of a little framed motto which his employer had framed and hung over his desk. It read:

> The greatest assets of any firm are the honor and courage of its salesmen; next comes the quality of its goods.

Religious martyrs in their extremity have been known to receive answers from the heavens they interrogated. Thomas Strawbridge also had received his. He drew a deep puff of smoke, thumped away his cigar, which made a dull spiral of fire as it fell through the darkness; then he started briskly for the lighted windows across the street.

XIV

ONE of the palace guards delayed Strawbridge for a few moments at the entrance of the western wing of the *palacio* to ask his master if the American might be admitted. A little later the soldier returned and opened a door into a brightly lighted sitting-room which evidently corresponded to the music-room in the eastern wing of the *palacio*. Some rugs made of Indian blankets, chairs and a settee of colored native wickerwork gave a look of richness and rather intemperate color to the room.

The high light of this ensemble, that which held it all together and subordinated it, was the peon girl, Madruja. Strawbridge obtained rather a bewildered impression of her. In fact no man ever gets the details of an unusually comely woman at first glance. Half a dozen charms will snatch simultaneously for his attention—her eyes, ears, throat, the taper of her arms, the sheer of her ankles. It is confusing, and Strawbridge was confused.

General Fombombo arose from the wicker couch where he had been sitting beside the girl and begged permission to leave her for a moment. Madruja assented with a mute gesture. The President came forward to Strawbridge with both hands outstretched, radiating welcome.

"*Mi caro amigo*," he greeted, "I am charmed to have you see my little *ménage*. What do you think of my color-scheme?"

He stood gripping the drummer's hand and looking about at the room with that detachment which the arrival of a third person always gives an artist toward his work. The general picked out a doubtful point.

"What do you think of the clasp that holds down the drapery on her breast?"

Strawbridge barely managed to see the clasp against the glow of the girl. He said he thought it was a very nice clasp.

"No; I mean would you prefer garnet or ruby just there? I tried garnet at first, but I found that her eyes would endure the fire of a ruby. Ah, Señor Strawbridge, you are doubtless aware that not one woman in fifty can wear a ruby on her breast."

Strawbridge cleared his throat and said he knew they were very expensive.

This introduced a little gap in the conversation. The dictator changed his manner from the enthusiasm of an artist to the courtesy of a host.

"I believe you have not as yet had the pleasure of meeting Señorita Rosamel."

Here he led Strawbridge nearer Madruja.

"*Señorita*, may I present my dear friend, Señor Tomas Strawbridge of *Nueva York?*"

The girl remained seated and simply extended a hand. Whether she did this out of timidity or out of pride in her new silks and jewels the drummer could not guess. The hand she placed in his was small and not badly shaped but hard and rough from the work of a peon woman.

She said nothing at all, but sat looking at Strawbridge out of black eyes which could endure the fire of a ruby. They were shining, surfacy eyes such as one sees in wild animals and in entirely illiterate persons. What thoughts lay behind those surfaces, whether any at all or not, the drummer could not get the slightest inkling.

However she seemed tractable enough. With a little sinuous movement she made room on the couch for the general. With perfect inertness she allowed him to possess her hand. He spread it in his palm and began patting and stroking it while his conversation returned to Strawbridge.

"You may light a cigar in here and be comfortable," he invited. "Madruja is no obstacle to relaxation—rather an assistance. Have you never observed that your thoughts flow more smoothly in the presence of a pretty woman?"

Strawbridge stared at the general.

"You can think better with a woman around?" he blurted out.

"*Seguramente, señor*," agreed the dictator. "Have you not observed that some twiddle a pencil when they think, others smoke, some walk up and down with their hands behind their backs? All of these are mere bachelorish makeshifts. Your true thinker meditates with a woman by his side. It is, you might say, *señor*, the only connection between a woman and thought."

Strawbridge resented this woman and this establishment in the west wing of the *palacio* on account of the *señora*, so he said with disapproval tingeing his tones—

"Well, I'm sure I couldn't puzzle out anything if there was a woman near me."

"That is the result of incorrect training, one might say immoral training," returned the general easily. "In the '*Diario de Bucaramanga*' by de la Croix we learn that Bolivar was unable to plan any of the great battles which freed the South American continent except when he was dancing with a woman. Every night during his military campaigns he danced till one or two o'clock, planning his next great stroke at Spain. That is what genius is, Señor Strawbridge—the ability to draw on outside sources of power. You might say the *señoritas* of this country furnished Bolivar with the power to lift this whole continent from tyranny to the untrammeled freedom enjoyed in Rio Negro today."

The general paused a moment and continued.

"Take myself and Madruja. Inspired by this girl, I will extend the State of Rio Negro from the Andes to the sea. She and I will build up metropolises, gardenize the llanos, develop a people with the finesse of the French, the energy of the American and the immensitude of the Spanish!"

He pressed Madruja's rough hand in both his own with the magnificence of the vision, then came down to a more normal mood.

This last ebullition was more than Strawbridge could tolerate. If all this had been expounded over the hand of Dolores Fombombo Strawbridge would have thought the relations between the President and his wife the most beautiful he had ever known. Now Strawbridge had to speak for Dolores.

"Look here," he critized, "that's all right. You seem to get a lot of pep out of the young lady; but look here—" at this point Mr. Strawbridge made one of those moral pauses which Americans inherit from their Sunday-school teachers—"had you thought of your wife?"

"Had I thought of my wife?"

"Yes—had you?"

"What is there to think of my wife?"

For some reason the drummer blushed slightly.

"It looks to me like she ought to come in there somewhere. Doesn't look like another woman should step in and take her place——"

The general was enlightened.

"I see what you mean."

He smiled.

"That is a quaint American idea of yours."

"It's American," defended Strawbridge stoutly, "but I don't see that it's quaint."

"Perhaps 'quaint' is not the word; but if I may speak impersonally and in no way appear to criticize the American viewpoint, I would say it is very disrespectful in a man to think of his wife in any such way. I feel safe in saying no Spanish *caballero* would consider it for a moment."

The drummer stared at this extraordinary viewpoint.

"Disrespectful! Do you think it would be disrespectful to plan your empire under the inspiration of a woman like Dolores?"

"*Caramba*, Señor Strawbridge, certainly. When I enter my wife's presence I am a Spanish gentleman."

Here the dictator made a bow to a space which represented his wife.

"I think of nothing but her. For example, if Dolores were in this room would our conversation have wandered about like this? Certainly not. The Spaniard seeks diversion with other women, Señor Strawbridge, out of sincere respect for and devotion to—" he made another slight bow toward the empty space—"his wife."

IT WAS an extraordinary attitude and as far as the drummer could analyze it seemed informed with a fine chivalry. Strawbridge sat looking rather numbly at the dictator. Then he gave up that point of attack and shifted the topic of conversation in American fashion by saying suddenly and rather loudly, "Well, not to change the subject," etc., etc., his tone and manner giving the genial impression that the speaker had just waked from a long nap and would now talk some himself.

"Well, not to change the subject, general, I dropped around tonight to set right a little mistake we made the other day."

The President abandoned South America's favorite topic, "woman," with evident reluctance.

"Yes?" he questioned.

"Yes; it's about Josefa."

The President repeated the name emtilyp.

"The little clerk you put in prison the other day. Don't you remember? You jailed him because he told me how you ran your Government."

Even the diplomatic general showed surprize.

"Josefa—how do you know I imprisoned a man named Josefa?"

Strawbridge burst out laughing.

"You can't expect me to tell who told me? You might jug that person too."

"Hardly that," said the dictator dryly. "Then would you tell me why this unmentioned person said I imprisoned a man by the name of Josefa?"

"I'll tell you about Josefa. He's already in trouble. The other day I was down at the Sol y Sombra, and I wanted to make a hardware display to boost trade in my line. Josefa was dead against it. I was about to put up the display anyway when Josefa said if I did it would certainly cause the Government tax on the store to advance and maybe lead to its confiscation. I didn't believe it, but he went ahead to tell me how the Government had bagged one man's ranch because it stood the dry season better than——"

"Señor Strawbridge," interrupted the general with a little line coming around the lobe of his nose, "you have been made the victim of the usual calumnious gossip which circulates too freely in Canalejos. The ranch to which you probably refer was a deserted hacienda, and rather than allow it to go to waste the Government occupied it."

Strawbridge saw by the general's face that he would help no one by pursuing that course, so he said, "Oh, was that the way?" as if he had heard the explanation for the first time.

He then shifted about to his next topic.

"General," he began, "I've been thinking about Canalejos and Rio Negro and the way you run things down here. Don't you believe you would get more out of it if you would make all investments perfectly safe in your country?"

"I will have to ask you to explain that too."

"For example, Fando, that peon whose horse you took for your cavalry. No doubt the loss of his horse stopped the cultivation of his hacienda; and yet to some extent the wealth of Rio Negro depends upon Fando's land being cultivated."

"That is true," admitted the dictator stiffly; "but it is more important that the liberty and independence of Rio Negro be maintained than that Fando have a horse. You must be aware, Señor Strawbridge, that the prime necessity of any Government is its Governmental existence. You are an American; everything you possess down to your body is liable to conscription in time of military necessity, is it not?"

"Yes, that's true; but I get paid for what my Government seizes."

"What would it pay you?"

"Money, of course."

"There you are," smiled the general, getting back on comfortable abstractions again. "Money is a medium of exchange, a promise of goods in the future. The value of American money depends upon America winning her wars.

"Unfortunately I have no Rio Negran money yet, though I think I shall print some. If I had it, of course I would pay Fando; why not? It wouldn't cost me anything. On the other hand if I finally win against the State of Venezuela, Fando will not be forgotten. In short, my dear Señor Strawbridge, I seize the goods of the people for the good of the people—just as every other Government does."

Thomas Strawbridge nodded his agreement and arose to make his devoirs with a sense of frustration. He wished he could have got Josefa out. The poor little monkey-eyed clerk was at that moment lying in some loathsome dungeon of La Fortuna— Well, it could not be helped.

Strawbridge gave a little sigh, smiled mechanically and advanced to the settee with outstretched hand.

"Well, I hope my talk has done no harm, general. I'm really keen to help you in a business way."

The dictator arose and suggested that his guest remain. He said Madruja would be charmed if Strawbridge would stay. With the girl thrust on his attention like that the salesman bent over her hand to make his adieux to her.

Her hand rested limply in the drummer's, and she remained mute while Strawbridge expressed his pleasure at meeting her.

As she stood thus, looking at him over their clasped hands with her black surfacy eyes, there came the sound of a door opening behind the man. The black eyes of the girl shifted a little from Strawbridge's face and stared over his shoulder.

A change came over her features as if she had seen a ghost. Even her scarlet lips paled. With her mouth she formed, rather than said, the name—

"Esteban!"

BOTH Fombombo and Strawbridge whirled. In the doorway stood a peon boy with a knife in his hand. He wore the cheap finery which peons do for concert night. Esteban's face was drawn and clay-colored, and he stood blinking in the bright light which bewildered his eyes.

The dictator evidently did not know who Esteban was. He rapped out sternly—

"*Bribon*, what do you mean entering this room without permission?"

The youth replied with a sudden lunge at the President. Strawbridge saw the flash of the knife, and with a remnant of his old football interference shot his body, shoulder down, straight into the midriff of the leaping boy.

The American's two hundred and ten pounds hit the youth like a catapult. It smashed him backward and down. His knife snapped out of his hand; his hat flew off; his head struck heavily on the tiled floor. The general was calling angrily for the guards. A moment later three of these little men entered the door with their rifles.

The President pointed at the youth on the floor.

"Take that *bribon*. He made an attack on me. You rascals will have to explain how he got in!"

The three guards pounced on the peon, rather panic-struck. They got him up and held his arms behind him. Strawbridge's blow in the stomach had made Esteban sick, and now he bent over as far as his captors would permit, retching and slobbering and looking at the girl with anguished eyes.

"Madruja!" he gasped between his convulsions. "Eh, Madruja, *mi vida*, I would give my last breath for——"

"What are you saying to Madruja?" demanded the President.

"She is my wife," gasped Esteban painfully. "You locked her up in this room and——"

The dictator stared at the fellow.

"Locked her up? She came to me of her own will!"

He turned to the girl, and his voice changed.

"Here, Madruja, my darling, my little

heaven, deny this empty-headed rascal's charge!"

The girl stood staring at the two men with her surfacy black eyes.

"What, *Señor el Presidente?*" she trembled.

"Deny this charge; or rather here is a villain who calls himself your husband. Choose between us. You are free; you have always been free. And you, *bribon*, you too are free. I mean it. Loose him, men! Choose between me and this wretch!"

The three guards released Esteban's arms. The peon looked about, then advanced a step toward the girl with a bewildered joy coming into his sick face.

"Madruja!" he wavered, holding out his arms. "Madruja, did you hear what the *Presidente* said? Did you hear what the good *Presidente* said, little Madruja?"

He was approaching her, shuddering with his sickness and his sudden rapture.

The girl looked at him fixedly with her shining, surfacy eyes. She withdrew a step.

"*Caramba,* Esteban," she shrugged, "you smell of donkeys. You have done a mad thing coming here. I am not a peon girl any more. I live in the *palacio* of *Señor el Presidente*. Look at me! See this silk, this ruby! Do you imagine I would grind cassava for a peon who smells like a donkey—puh!"

She shrugged like the Spanish *señorita* she was and turned away to a window.

In the silence that followed one of the little guards saluted.

"What shall we do with him, your Excellency?"

"Kick him out of the *palacio* and let him go!"

The three soldiers obeyed literally and promptly. They seized Esteban from behind and trundled him toward the door with hard kicks of their knees. The wretch moved, half-falling, half-held up in a series of jounces which kept his head bobbing and his mop of shining, youthful hair whipping from side to side. After the quartet passed through the door Strawbridge could still hear the muffled thuds of the guards' knees as they kicked Esteban down the corridor toward the entrance.

The incident left Strawbridge mute. The dictator interrupted his intellectual vacancy by saying:

"Señor Strawbridge, I have you to thank for your interference. I might have had a cut or two from that young madman before I could have secured his knife."

"It was nothing, general; nothing at all. As I have said before any little service——"

He broke off and stood pondering a moment, then asked—

"Will you tell me, general, why you imprison Josefa for speaking merely a word of criticism of your country, and then have Esteban kicked out and allowed to go free when he makes an attack on your life?"

The dictator shrugged.

"What I did to Esteban will stop Esteban. What I did to Josefa will stop Josefa."

The President of Rio Negro stood faintly smiling.

Strawbridge was outraged.

"Why, there is no justice in that! Imprison a man for life for speaking a word, let another go free when he attempts murder!"

The President regarded his guest with amused eyes.

"Señor Strawbridge, what you say is a result of your unfortunate American commercial training. You Americans have a naïve idea that justice is a sort of balancing of an account. You try to make the severity of the punishment balance with the heinousness of the crime. It is your national instinct to keep a ledger.

"But what is justice? Is there any accountant in heaven or on earth calling for any such exactitude? Is punishment a thing that can be measured or weighed? What good does punishing a man do? Whom does it benefit? Nobody.

"There is only one object in punishment, and that is to stop crimes. Any effort to balance a punishment with a crime is absurd and the work of infantile intelligences.

"Take Esteban. He attacked my life. If I disgrace him before this lovely *señorita* here, if I kick him out of my palace, do you fancy he will ever have the hardihood to return? You know he won't.

"On the contrary, if I had imprisoned him as I did Josefa, that would have made a hero of him, and a score of other young blades would feel obliged to come and chop at me with their knives. If they know they will be kicked out and laughed at, they will not come. In short the punishment cures the crime."

"But look at Josefa!" cried Strawbridge. "He did almost nothing, and you have put him in a dungeon for life!"

The dictator became stern.

"He talked too much. The only place for a man who talks too much is to put him in a place where there is no one to talk to. No other punishment on earth will stop an idle tongue. It is not that I want to be severe, but I must be effective."

Strawbridge stood thinking over this extraordinary code of law. It was not justice as the drummer knew it; it was a code of expediency. As usual, the President's reasoning appeared to be correct and unanswerable.

The drummer said good-by for the last time and walked out into the corridor. He had a feeling as he went out into the night again that he had presented his side of the argument—that is to say the case of Josefa and a plea for better business conditions in the country—very poorly indeed. It had somehow slid off the President and given him all the advantage.

He drew a long breath as he looked back at the lights in the window. Well, that was over, and his order for rifles was intact.

XV

TO THOMAS STRAWBRIDGE the expedition against San Geronimo was invested with a queer sense of unreality. To go adventuring after a new city seemed a page torn out of medieval history; it held none of the modern logic of business in which the drummer functioned, and which to him gave that flow of events called Life, its feeling of sequence and dependableness.

Every detail of the expedition cast a faint doubt on the credibility of the drummer's impressions—the rabble of peon cavalry, mounted on mules, donkeys and a few horses; a motley of women, wives, and sweethearts of the soldiers, some in carts, some riding donkeys, some on foot.

The troops hauled a single three-pound field-gun with its snout in an old canvas bag and its breech wrapped in palm-leaves. Not less unbelievable was the priest, Father Benicio, in his black cassock and round black priest's hat. He was mounted on a mule and at his pommel hung his crucifix, a little gourd of consecrated oil and a vial of holy water. With these instruments of grace he would administer extreme unction to the unfortunate of the expedition.

The string of adventurers was sufficiently long so that when Strawbridge looked back from his place in the van the women and soldiers at the end of the column appeared hazy from the dust and shimmered with the heat-waves.

It was a breathless and wilting heat. When Strawbridge had crossed the llanos in a motor-car the hot wind had depressed him, but now without the speed of the automobile the heat enveloped him with a greasy, pinching sensation. The warmth of his horse's body kept his legs sudsy.

He tried to squirm his flesh away from his wet underclothes. Often he would ride five minutes at a time with his eyes shut against the glare of the sun reflected from the sand.

For ten or twelve kilometers the route of the army followed the left bank of the Rio Negro. The rapids set in just below the city of Canalejos, and for upward a mile they filled the air with a vast, watery rumble.

But the river was so wide that Strawbridge could see from the shore nothing but a ripple in the broad yellow waters. The thunder of the rapids appeared to arise out of a placid expanse without cause. It was as if the river were in some mysterious travail.

The passage of the army flushed white egrets from along the bank, and once six flamingoes arose and winged slowly away, making a crimson line against the sky. Along the sand-bars huge caymans slept in an ecstasy of heat. Their long, whitish bellies fitted over stones and the curves in the sand with a kind of disgusting flexibility.

Some time later the line of march veered away from the river and lost itself in the endless, almost imperceptible undulations of the llanos. The monotony of these llanos somehow nibbled away the last shred of reality for Thomas Strawbridge. It seemed to him that everything in the world had ceased to exist except this shimmering furnace of sand. Even Canalejos was erased. It was unthinkable that somewhere in this dancing heat lay the cool crypt of the cathedral, the shade of the plaza, that somewhere the *señora* played a piano in a pleasant room in the palacio.

Thought of the *señora* kept recurring to his baked brain. He recalled the touch of her hand and the tone in which she bade him good-by. Indeed this little woman in her nun's attire had been a sort of last landfall of reality when Thomas Strawbridge had sailed off into this sea of illusion.

The drummer rode at a post of honor, at the head of the column beside Coronel Saturnino. Behind him came the fighters in a gradually thickening dust until the end of the column traveled in a cloud.

The *coronel* himself moved along impassively, apparently as little affected by the heat as the saddle he sat. He kept looking about as if he recognized landmarks in the endless repetition of the llanos. Presently he pointed through the glare and said—

"There is *El Limon,* Señor Strawbridge."

The drummer screwed up his eyes against the shimmer and made out what looked like a grove of trees on the horizon. Nearer the spot developed into trees and a house of some sort. There seemed to be only one house.

Strawbridge stared mechanically. The heat dulled his perceptions.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A hacienda. It belongs to an English firm and is in Federal territory. We are outside of General Fombombo's scope of influence now."

Strawbridge repeated these last words mechanically; the meaning was almost baked out of them by the heat of the sun beating on his head. "Outside of General Fombombo's scope of influence." The drummer remembered the red line on the map in the library.

So that was where he was—on that red line. The whole force of peons, officers, men and women were crossing that red line and trying to extend it.

"How far is it to San Geronimo?" he asked.

"We're about half-way."

Strawbridge rode on for ten or fifteen minutes with his eyes resting on the deep green of the grove. It was a eucalyptus grove. He noted this vaguely, then his mind went back to the answer to his questions. They were about half the distance— Outside the scope of General Fombombo's influence— A red line on the map of Venezuela; they were extending that, pushing it eastward and southward— Somewhere the *señora* was playing a piano in a cool room, the pleasant *señora*— But it was hot!

THE estate of *El Limon* in the Orinoco basin belonged to an English meat-packing concern and it was managed by a Trinidadian and his wife, the Tollivers. These English colonials lived in a ranch-house made of stone instead of adobe.

Near the dwelling-house stood a vast wooden barn. It was this barn which Strawbridge had seen from a distance.

House and barn were shaded by a magnificent eucalyptus grove, and these great trees formed the only restful spot amid the leagues of burning llanos. It was an English experiment and importation, this grove, and not another like it existed in all Venezuela.

Mr. Tolliver was a tall, rangy man wearing a native palm fiber hat and *alpargatas.* He was burned browner than the natives themselves, but it was the deep reddish brown of the Anglo-Saxon, not the yellowish brown of a Spaniard. Out of this deep-brown face two pale English eyes looked on Venezuela in chill condemnation.

As the seekers of liberty rode up Mr. Tolliver stood with his back to a high barbed-wire enclosure around his barn with his elbows and one big foot propped back against its wires. He stood looking at the cavalcade with a depth of sarcasm marking his bearded mouth and glinting out of his pale eyes. As the army filed into the cool glade Mr. Tolliver remarked in the queer mouthy English of a West Indian colonial—

"Well, you —— sons of liberty are after my stock again, I see."

Coronel Saturnino betrayed no annoyance at this reception. He bade the rancher "*buenos tardes*" and asked if his men might eat in the shade. The big Trinidadian gave a sardonic consent. Saturnino sat on his horse, enjoying this relief from the sun and glanced about over the barbed-wire enclosure.

"You have a fine Hereford bull, Señor Tolliver," he admired.

The rancher did not turn his head.

"At present I have," he remarked dryly.

"And some excellent chickens," smiled the *coronel,* who seemed to be enjoying some private jest.

These very mild and complimentary observations seemed suddenly to enrage Tolliver. He put his foot down and burst out:

"What the —— —— makes you drool along like that? Why don't you say what you're going to steal and quit purring like a cat?"

Saturnino shrugged politely.

"You must pardon me, Señor Tolliver. I so seldom meet an Englishman I am not yet an expert in discourtesy."

The officer continued his observation of the estate: "And horses, Señor Tolliver, mounts for my men. If you could dispose of a few horses——"

The suggestion irritated the Trinidadian to a remarkable degree. His eyes filled with a pale fire and he called down curses on the *coronel* with a concentration which surprized the drummer.

In the midst of this outburst the rancher's eyes fell on Strawbridge. He stopped his profanity abruptly and stared.

"Look here," he demanded, "aren't you a white man?"

The tone and implication left Strawbridge rather uncomfortable in the presence of the Venezuelan.

"I'm an American," he said, avoiding the issue of color.

"Well, what the —— —— are you following around this gang of cutthroats and horse-thieves for?"

The rancher's qualifications were edged with a righteous anger. Indeed the fellow's oaths seemed to strip off a certain moral semblance which had hung over the expedition and left it threadbare and shabby. The drummer hardly knew how to answer when Coronel Saturnino relieved him of the necessity of answering at all. The officer very courteously introduced the rancher to the salesman and explained the latter's business.

The deep-brown Englishman stood appraising Strawbridge and at last remarked:

"Well, you Americans certainly chase dollars in tighter places than any other decent man would. But anyway you're a white man. So come on in and have lunch. Me and my wife get so —— lonesome out here in this —— hole we're glad to see anything that's white."

Strawbridge was about to refuse this scathing hospitality when Coronel Saturnino burst out laughing.

"Go on," he urged. "We'll be here for some time rounding up some horses, and you need a rest and something to eat, you look exhausted."

Strawbridge agreed and climbed stiffly off his horse. Notwithstanding the Englishman's *brusquerie* still Strawbridge rather like the tall, brown, pale-eyed man. His downrightness was as bracing as a cold shower after the perpetual tepid courtesy of the Venezuelans.

Once Tolliver had decided to accept Thomas Strawbridge as a respectable white man in good standing, he did it wholeheartedly. He preceded his guest through a yard set with flowers in formal stone-bordered beds, a mode of flower-arrangement dear to an Englishwoman's heart no matter in what part of the world she is thrown.

The stone house had a wide wooden porch running completely around it. In front it was furnished with mats, a number of pieces of porch furniture and a swing; around to one side were littered harness, garden tools, two or three boxes and a number of large calabashes sawed off at the top. All the doors and windows were screened with copper gauze. Tolliver went to the door and spoke through the screen.

"Lizzie," he called, "we will have Mr. Strawbridge, an American gentleman, to lunch with us."

And a moment later a pleasant woman's voice called back—

"Ask him will he have green or black tea, George."

While the two men were seated on the porch looking over the grove, Tolliver with an Englishman's pertinacity returned to the topic of American dollar-chasing.

"I don't see how you run around with these scrapings," he criticized. "My eyes, man, you've got to be careful who you sell rifles to in this —— country. Half these beggars can't be trusted with firearms——"

He broke off, peering out into his barn-lot.

"Look—look yonder; those women catching up my chickens. When an army of liberation sets out from Canalejos about half of 'em stop at my ranch, load up with my livestock and go back home, the —— thieving——"

Here Tolliver clapped his hands, and a native boy of about fourteen appeared in the doorway.

"Pedro," snapped the rancher, "go tell that —— officer not to disturb any hens with chickens. I won't have it!"

The boy bobbed and darted away with the message.

The Trinidadian watched him go, and then returned sourly to the subject under discussion.

"Revolutions are always stewing in Rio

Negro; one set of thieves after another. A bunch comes through every six or eight months. They are always about to do wonderful things.

"I remember one time I provisioned General Dimancho. He was just about to save his country. I believed him. He won and spoiled like an egg.

"Then Miedo made me a very expensive visit. He really talked me over. They can all talk you over if you listen to 'em. As long as they are not in power they're the best of patriots.

"Miedo was going to stabilize Venezuela. Well, he did take Rio Negro, and he squeezed it drier than the shell of that calabash yonder."

The rancher made a rough gesture.

"——, the rotters who have squirmed and fought their way to power and debauchery in this damnable country!"

The rancher stared into the grove with pale, angry eyes.

"The trouble is in the stock—scrub—scum—you can't make any decent Government out of this—manure."

And Tolliver dropped the subject.

TWENTY minutes later a rather faded but still pretty young woman in a gingham dress came out of the door, smiled at the two men and told them that tiffin was ready. Strawbridge was introduced to Lizzie Tolliver. Later during the lunch the drummer learned that his hostess was the daughter of the Bishop of St. Kitts.

The luncheon hour was occupied by George Tolliver in relating the peculiar difficulties which beset his cattle ranch. This hacienda had been established as a feeder for an English meat-packing corporation at Valencia.

To begin with, a packing-house had been established at Valencia under contract with the Venezuelan President to furnish so many first-class steers daily. This the President had failed to do, furnishing instead a supply of under-grade animals. Repeated protests from the English company produced no effect.

At last the company had established this ranch on the Orinoco to furnish itself with meat. The venture proved a success. By importing fine bulls the company raised the grade of the llano longhorns into a very superior beef cattle.

As soon as the English syndicate had demonstrated its ability to raise good beef the Venezuelan President instructed the Venezuelan Congress to place a heavy inter-State tax on all cattle transported from one State to another. This tax was so onerous that the company could not afford to move a hoof from the State of Guarico to the State of Carabobo, where Valencia was situated. The result was that the company was forced to buy the President's low-grade cattle while the meat raised on its own hacienda had no possible market and simply went to waste.

At the conclusion of this narrative Tolliver broke into acidulous laughter.

"Now you see why I aided General Dimancho and General Miedo to start a revolution against the Venezuelan Government. In fact I was given the hint from the London office. Well, both of these men won in their turn and both grew so bad that they were ousted. Fombombo was the last deliverer. But of late I hear rumors that Fombombo has turned out to be a —— rascal, and they are trying to overthrow him now."

Here Lizzie Tolliver, who had been giving her husband significant glances throughout this narrative, interrupted to say—

"George, you would better not speak so unreservedly of Mr. Strawbridge's friends."

"Friends! Friends!" scouted the Trinidadian. "They are not Strawbridge's friends! We Anglo-Saxons trade with these natives; we talk with 'em, live among 'em and occasionally marry 'em; but we never really get acquainted with any of 'em, and we never make a friend."

The bishop's daughter attempted restraint again.

"Really, George, we must remember that we are all children of our heavenly Father."

Tolliver grunted.

"Oh—that's all right, Lizzie; you're right, I know."

There was a certain verity in the rancher's appraisal, and the Tollivers themselves proved it. During this brief lunch hour the drummer and his English hosts were talking intimately and understandingly in a fashion which Strawbridge perhaps would never achieve with the *coronel*, Rubito, Father Benicio or even with *la Señora*.

The drummer wondered about *la Señora*.

"What makes such a difference?" pondered the salesman aloud.

The rancher shook his head.

"They're not our sort, not tuned with us."

He sat puzzling over it and finally boiled down his objection to them in this form—

"They're not business people."

Strawbridge looked up earnestly.

"Well, that's right. You've hit the nail on the head. They sure are not a business people."

A few minutes later the little party was interrupted by the appearance of the native boy in the doorway who said that Coronel Saturnino was waiting outside. Tolliver arose, and Strawbridge followed, saying perhaps the troops were ready to march.

On the porch they found Coronel Saturnino standing at attention with a very affable air and holding in his hand a sheet of paper.

He made a slight bow and tendered the paper.

"Here is a receipt, Señor Tolliver, for twenty horses, three cows, fifty chickens and eleven ducks," he explained blandly. "As we come back by here General Fombombo would greatly appreciate one of your thoroughbred Hereford bulls to be used on his ranch for breeding-purposes, and I have just included the bull in this receipt."

The Trinidadian burst out into another paroxysm of profane anger. The officer shrugged mildly.

"You need not take it, *mi amigo*, unless you want it; but it will be valuable to you some day."

"What day? How? I've heard that before!"

"This receipt is payable on the day General Fombombo extends his estate to the sea. When that day comes present this receipt at the capitol of the future State of Rio Negro and you will be paid in full."

Tolliver broke into sardonic laughter.

"To —— with you and your receipt! General Miedo was to pay me when he marched into Caracas as a conqueror."

Coronel Saturnino bowed and tossed the paper away.

"You English folk are childish," he philosophized. "You have no sense of the inevitable. Your estate here, *señor*, suffers from the same evils as all other citizens of Venezuela. I and my men out there are risking our lives to rectify those ills. Many of them will die tomorrow; that is ineluctable. Yet while they spend their lives to benefit you, you grudge them even the beef and a few fowls which they eat and the horses upon which they ride to their death."

Tolliver drew a disgusted mouth.

"I've heard that so many times it makes me sick."

Saturnino bowed again.

"May I pay my respects to the *señora*, and may I wish you *adios pues*."

He turned to Strawbridge.

"*Señor*, the company awaits your convenience."

The drummer wrung Tolliver's hand. He seldom so regretted leaving a chance acquaintance. The Trinidadian, too, seemed moved.

"Can't you stay here until these spiggoties get back?" he questioned. "It's hot as —— on the llanos, and you don't look any too fit."

"Wish I could stay, Tolliver, but I got to go," explained the salesman wistfully. "Got to get a line on this business from all sides. My house sent me out here for that, and my old man expects it."

The Englishman understood perfectly. He himself was in an uncomfortable hole where he stayed on year after year because his company expected it. He gripped the American's hand.

"I just hope you get back all right. Good-by and good luck, old man. Don't mind me taking you for a —— rascal when you rode up with these horse thieves."

This maladroitness made Strawbridge's leave taking as uncomfortable as his reception had been. Nevertheless he liked the rancher. There was something heartening and bracing about him. He liked Lizzie Tolliver. He understood them both.

XVI

THE commandeering of the horses at the English ranch shocked Thomas Strawbridge; when the cavalcade set forth on the march again, the heat and glare of the llanos aggravated his mental disturbance. As he sweltered in the center of a vast shimmering horizon, he kept repeating mentally at unexpected intervals the epithet, "horse thieves." Each time these words bobbed up in his mind he put them down rather like a man who is trying to keep some buoyant object under water.

"Horse thieves—horse thieves—horse thieves—" over and over. His thinking did not progress much further than that.

What made the buoyant object so difficult to control was the fact that he himself was riding one of Tolliver's horses. The very rhythm of the fine animal between his legs was a reminder and a reproach.

Sweat trickled into the drummer's eyes and stung them. He blinked through the quivering heat with screwed-up lids and wondered what he could have done about the horse. When Coronel Saturnino insisted that he take one of the best of the English mounts he could not have said—

"No; I am a decent American salesman, and I won't ride a stolen horse."

He could not say such a thing as that in the face of the *coronel's* polite consideration.

On the other hand the damning thought that he was riding a stolen horse gnawed at the drummer with the persistence of a rat. It gave him a faint, ghastly feeling in the pit of his stomach, where perhaps is located the genuine seat of conscience with us all.

Presently Strawbridge noted a surprizing thing. Looking back over the cavalcade, he observed Father Benicio riding one of the confiscated horses. The good father jogged along in his dusty black cassock and his little round priest's hat with the sacred emblems dangling from his pommel, and he was riding a stolen horse.

His questionable mount had not changed the priest's face at all. It was the same thin, ascetic face with its look of passionate spirituality burning through the repression, almost the mortification of the flesh. Strawbridge wondered what mental attitude Father Benicio assumed toward his horse in order to preserve so eremitic an expression. He felt the holy father must have some inward justification which he himself did not possess.

Almost involuntarily he picked his way among the troopers to the priest's side. As he came near he observed that Gumersindo was riding beside the father. The negro editor's face was covered with dust, and he looked queer because the dust settling in the furrows of his forehead made whitish lines against his black skin.

The black man waved the American a grave salute.

"Do you know, Señor Strawbridge," he called above the wide noise of the horses' feet, "that this is the same sort of expedition that Bolivar led against Montillo when he freed this continent? They had beaten the *Libertador* everywhere else; but when they threw him back on to these interminable llanos he drew fresh strength like Antæus and struggled on."

Strawbridge nodded wearily.

"Sure, sure——"

He looked at the priest, a little doubtful how to proceed. The negro journalist continued talking in a sort of exaltation:

"I never start on an expedition of this kind but what I think, 'Perhaps today I am making history.'

"That is a wonderful thought, Father Benicio. History! Think, perhaps this very moment is historical! Perhaps it will be embalmed in the memory of the future. It is just as if we should march forever through the mind of mankind!

"Other deedless generations will rise up and vanish as unremarked as the succeeding harvests of llano grass, but perhaps what we do today will be painted, carved in marble, sung in song and told in story as long as civilization lasts! I say it is possible!"

Such a dithyramb from a negro among a band of horse thieves moved Strawbridge with a certain disgust. He drew a handkerchief and wiped his sweaty, gritty face.

"I guess you're making history for that English ranch," he satirized. "A record of these horses will appear in their profit-and-loss column."

Gumersindo looked around at the drummer and suddenly began to laugh.

"*Caramba!* He's thinking about the dollars and cents of this adventure!"

This was just the fillip needed to set off the drummer. He straightened in his saddle:

"Well, by ——, it's not dollars and cents either; it's just plain honesty. I don't know how you fellows feel, but I'm —— uncomfortable riding a horse we stole from Tolliver!"

Both editor and priest were staring at the drummer.

"What a disturbance over a detail!" ejaculated the black man.

"How do you feel about your mount, Father Benicio?" asked Strawbridge.

The priest's ascetic face relaxed into a rather pleasant smile.

"I feel it is much more comfortable than the mule I rode, my son."

The drummer was amazed.

"Don't you think it's wrong?"

"Our action is directed toward a great and noble end, my son. Venezuela is sick to death. If confiscating these horses rids the country of a dictator surely the end justifies the means?"

"But look here!" cried Strawbridge. "The English company is not in on this. They are the innocent bystander who gets the bullet through the heart."

"They are already shot through the heart, *señor*," answered Father Benicio patiently. "Their horses and cattle are worth nothing to them on account of unjust legislation."

"But their property still belongs to them!" cried the drummer. "That doesn't justify us in stealing it!"

"Did God create these horses simply to live and die without being of use to any one?"

"That's up to the company. They are their horses."

THE priest looked at the drummer queerly. Gumersindo interposed: "Father, let me explain Señor Strawbridge to you. I said a while ago he had reduced this to dollars and cents. So he has. You must remember that property is a fetish in America. Americans do not possess their property, they are possessed by it. In America the prime factor of civilization is property; in Venezuela the prime factor is man."

Strawbridge was hot enough to grow angry instantly.

"Look here!" he cried. "Let me nail that lie right now while I got my hammer out! We Americans spend our money just as free as you Venezuelans and a —— sight freer!"

"But, Señor Strawbridge," returned the editor politely, "that has nothing to do with my analysis. All your social framework in America is built around money. Rich men are respected and poor men are not. It would be better to say that in America property is respected and men are not."

"That's impossible!" cried Strawbridge, getting angrier all the time.

"Not at all. When an American loses his money he loses the friendship and respect of his fellow Americans. The man who acquires the former rich man's fortune acquires also the respect that goes with it."

Gumersindo made a gesture.

"*Pues*, do you recall, Señor Strawbridge, that the first draft of the American Declaration of Independence read in this fashion:

> "All men are born free and equal and are equally entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of property.

"The word 'happiness' substituted by Jefferson was merely an American euphemism for 'property'; it means the same thing in America."

"Why, by ——, I recall nothing of the kind!" shouted Strawbridge with the American conviction that if one denied history in a loud voice it would cease to exist. "No; that's just a —— lie some —— Venezuelan started on Americans!"

"Certainly I am no expert in American history," agreed the editor smoothly. "You doubtless know the history of your country better than I do."

"Well I hope I do!" grumbled Strawbridge, feeling for the moment that because he was an American he necessarily knew more of American history than Gumersindo, who was not an American.

"So, dropping the historical statement—which may be false, although I discovered it in some research work in your own Congressional Library at Washington—dropping that, pure inductive reasoning will tell you Americans do respect property and that they do not respect human beings.

"Remember your country is populated mainly by immigrants who came to the New World to seek their fortunes. These newcomers were mainly without culture and without any feeling for human values. They were poor, and never having had any money, they naturally thought that money must contain all value.

"Therefore they transposed the value of a man's fortune to the man himself. They thought any man who became wealthy must have great value, and they called him a success.

"They thought any painting which commanded a high price must be a great painting; they thought any piece of jazz music which sold a million copies must be a great piece of music. They thought that any house which cost a million dollars must necessarily be finer than one that cost only five thousand dollars. Now Americans think that."

The drummer peered hard at the negro editor.

"Well, by ——, that's a fact," he declared vigorously. "Nobody denies that, do they? Don't you know a million-dollar house would be finer than a five-thousand-dollar house?"

Even Father Benicio joined Gumersindo in the laughter this article of faith evoked.

"*Pues*," placated the priest the next moment. "That is the reason, my son, why we ride our horses without compunction and why your horse annoys you. And I must observe that your scruples honor you. I respect your frankness and your point of view."

Strawbridge rode some further distance with the two men, but he was uncomfortable. He knew they were amused at him, and it was not pleasant. Presently he returned to the head of the column.

XVII

AT LAST Strawbridge's adventure had come to a focus. He sat, galled and dusty, on his English mount and stared at the distant, metallic gleam which encircled the southern and western segments of the horizon. That thin, shining arc was the junction of the Orinoco and the Rio Negro.

Against its shimmer arose a single spire so tiny and so far-away that the drummer had to scrutinize it with particularity before he could make it out at all. So this was the upshot of all their riding and burning and thirsting—for these sweat-caked peons to advance against a church steeple!

Half a dozen different impressions clamored for the American's attention. Just behind him officers were barking their soldiers into two squads.

A little farther to the rear the men were pulling themselves from their wives and sweethearts to join their ranks again. There was something elemental and unashamed in the passion of their parting.

They were of much the same color as the sand they trod. They might have been figures sprung out of the heat and travail of the melancholy llanos, as indeed they were.

They clung to each other, these earth-colored peons; they sobbed, they kissed each other with unrestraint, absorbed in their griefs. There was something wide and impersonal in this passionate outpouring of their misery. They were mummers depicting completely what every lover feels on parting with his love.

Some inhibition, some reserve, seemed to melt in Strawbridge's mind, and he thought of the *señora* with a trembling tenderness. He could see her delicate face looking at him sorrowfully. Such a sense of pathos filled him that he wondered if it did not forbode some evil to him. Perhaps he was about to be killed; or else why should the *señora's* sad face have appeared to him so vividly?

Strawbridge became aware of a horseman coming up on his left. The drummer turned carefully in his saddle so as not to hurt his galled crotch. It was Coronel Saturnino, his face a mask of dust. For once the *coronel* seemed keen and alive. His black eyes set in this dust-mask were full of fire, but the dusty mouth was set in its inevitable sardonic quirk.

"I rode over to suggest that you hang a carbine to your saddle," he smiled.

Strawbridge looked down at his pommel doubtfully. "I thought perhaps if I went in as a neutral——"

"*Pues*, you are likely not to come out at all."

"Then you think I had better carry a gun?"

"It's safer."

The *coronel* beckoned a man to him, gave an order that sent him to the rear, and presently he returned with a carbine for Strawbridge. While the peon strapped it to the drummer's saddle the *coronel's* black eyes passed over his recruits with their look of chronic amusement.

"These peons are going out to fight for their freedom," he observed with his tone of satire. "They are perpetually going out to fight for their freedom. Different saviors rise up—a Miedo, a Fombombo; now it is Saturnino, and only the Holy Virgin knows who next will be leading these tatterdemalions to freedom!"

He looked at the drummer with sardonic wrinkles in his dust mask.

The drummer tried to shift his leg so it would not touch the hard carbine. He was somehow incensed at Saturnino's tone.

"What better thing can they fight for than their freedom?"

The *coronel* shrugged.

"Probably nothing. It makes a very

exciting game for gentlemen—these peons wanting to be free. What finer thing could a peon do than to entertain a *caballero?*"

Strawbridge stared at the dust-mask.

"Good God, Saturnino, is that all this is to you—an entertainment, a game?"

The officer shrugged again.

"*Pues*, of course it isn't business."

He paused with a quizzical look and then went on:

"But what I really rode over to tell you was, I am dividing the men into two squadrons. I will lead one in a frontal attack on the *casa fuerte*. The other Lieutenant Rosales will lead around by the river. It will make its way through the wharves and attack the *casa fuerte* from the rear."

Strawbridge had become attentive and nodded to these plans.

"You can go along with either of the parties," invited the *coronel*, "or you can stay here with the women until the fight is over."

"No, certainly not; I'll go by the river," chose Strawbridge at once.

The *coronel* nodded and smiled once again through his grime.

"As you will, and may luck wait on your courage. *Adios*."

The two men reached across the necks of their stolen horses and shook hands.

"Same to you, *coronel*, and so long," said the drummer, somewhat moved.

Saturnino suddenly jerked his horse in a curvet and saluted easily as the big English animal plunged with him back toward his line.

The drummer turned his own mount and rode toward Rosales' column. Lieutenant Rosales was a smallish, sharp-featured youth whose eyes were surrounded by such dark rings that they showed through the dust. Strawbridge remembered having seen him before in the plaza. Now he was going to fight under this little *roué*, perhaps die under his command. He felt as if he were going to fight with a crowd of street gamins. It was a mean adventure.

The men under Rosales sat stolid and quiet on their mules and horses. As Strawbridge rode up nearly every peon in the company looked at the American with the surfacy stare of illiterates and animals. Saturnino's sarcasm revisited the drummer's mind:

"These peons are perpetually fighting for their freedom under this savior and that. They've been at it upward of four centuries—now I'm leading them."

And he had laughed.

A queer gust of pity shivered through the American's bowels for these stolid men; arming and seeking a leader for four centuries. And now Saturnino led them, a man to whom their travail was a game!

AT THAT moment the sickly-looking officer whipped out his sword and barked an order, and the next moment the cavalry set off at a gallop through the heat and dust. The drummer fell into the ranks. He twisted his galled buttocks in his saddle for any easement he could find.

His carbine added a new pain to his riding. It banged his thigh with a queer adroitness. Within ten or fifteen minutes such a dust rose up among so many galloping horses as to make the air almost unbreathable.

These petty tortures so harassed the drummer that he looked forward to actual fighting as a relief. His whole lumbar region seemed scalded. He could not breathe.

To avoid the dust he swung his horse out of line and spurred to the van of the column. By the time the American was even with Lieutenant Rosales he had reached clean breathing, and he expanded his lungs with a sense of great relief.

But the peons, the dirt-colored men who after four hundred years of rebellion were now playing Coronel Saturnino's game, these peons rode resolutely in the heat and dust without breaking line. The thin-faced officer with the black circles about his eyes stared fixedly ahead.

Presently the troopers galloped up another long swell in the desert, and when they reached its crest Strawbridge was shocked to see how close they were upon the city of San Geronimo. He could see the red roofs of the adobes, a wireless tower run up like a spider-web, and the very bells in the campanile.

Around the street entrances were swarms of people in a state of excitement. Some went rushing into their houses; others went flying into the llanos, straggling figures bound for no other goal than to escape the coming storm.

Strawbridge watched the scene curiously, as if he were some idle spectator. But he forgot his scalded nates, his bumping rifle and his aching eyes. Presently Rosales drew his sword, swung his men out of line with the main entrance and veered toward the west, toward the stretch of water, which was growing more and more enormous as they approached it.

Horses and mules, on they went faster and faster. There was a wide space between the town and the river to give play to the overflow in the rainy season. Into this space Rosales headed.

The hoofs of the cavalcade made a dull drumming in the sand. Far down the river-bank, opposite the business part of town, Strawbridge could see the big freight *goletas* from Trinidad and Ciudad Bolivar, hastily making sail to escape the tempest.

Suddenly from somewhere over on their right came a hard blow in the air. The flat plains lent no resonance. It was simply a crash, a sharp, terrific impact.

It was followed by another, by twos and threes, by some indeterminable number. They hammered terrifically at Strawbridge's ear-drums with a sense of devastating power —the Federals in *casa fuerte* were cannonading Coronel Saturnino.

The cannonading must have been an agreed signal between the *coronel* and Rosales. At its roar the lieutenant yelped at his men and flung his column headlong into the open space along the wharves of San Geronimo.

Strawbridge went with them. He rode inexpertly, swaying dangerously on his English mount. With his left hand he jerked at his carbine trying to get it out of its holster; with his right he clung to the pommel of his saddle.

He peered ahead, and the whole wharfside seemed rushing at him, shaken by the terrific vibrations of the horse. The few stragglers left in sight scurried about to avoid the cavalry charge. Far ahead puffs of smoke came out of barred windows in the adobes.

At that moment the rumble of hoofs in the sand turned into a crashing clatter. The horses had struck the cobblestones of the wharf. An increased heat from the glare of the hot cobbles pinched the drummer.

More smoke-puffs blew out of the windows. It occurred to the drummer that these were peons firing on the cavalry.

A long row of palms were planted straight down the middle of the *playa*. As these palms vibrated toward him, the drummer glimpsed the head and shoulders of a man, pointing a rifle, high up in a clump of leaves. A little thrill went over the drummer. He swung his carbine toward the figure.

"Hey, look at that scoundrel up that palm! Blow him out of there!"

He pointed his gun without thinking of using it.

"Blow him out, I say!"

Half a dozen riders heard and looked. They swung up their carbines and fired as they galloped. Strawbridge could see the spatter of the bullets against the big leaves; next moment the head and shoulders made a limp lurch forward, and the figure of a man dropped out of the palm and turned slowly over and over in the air.

The drummer watched the fall from the dizzy height with a primitive satisfaction. He had wiped out an enemy.

He stared down the *playa*. Far down where the quay narrowed with distance a line of men were marching through the sunshine. He could see the glitter of their bayonets and their intense shadows moving in front of them.

At sight of these Federal soldiers the carbines about Strawbridge began a staccato snapping. The distant line of soldiers stopped, knelt, aimed, like a little row of toys in the brilliant sunshine; then came the faint crack of their volley.

The effect appalled Strawbridge. A peon on the drummer's right reeled from his saddle; ahead of him a horse reared and fell; his rider was flung on the cobbles under the hoofs of the horses. The drummer saw the wretch thresh about as he was broken up on the stones.

For answer the insurgents deployed the width of the *playa* between the houses and the palms and charged. Horses, mules, howling peons and chattering carbines roared down the quay.

The Federals gave one more volley, then suddenly broke and fled. They scurried in every direction. Their little human speed was so puny that the horses overhauled them like giants.

A feeling of tremendous strength filled Strawbridge. He was a *Gulliver* plunging down on Lilliputians. He selected a man to kill. The Federal sprinted desperately, but his short legs seemed barely to move in front of the English stallion.

The chase became a vertigo. A hard pulse pounded in Strawbridge's ears. Never before had he known the terrific excitement of hunting a man down and killing him.

The drummer's adroitness and horsemanship sharpened to the delight of murder. He cleared his carbine and aimed at the runner. He meant to hit him in the cross of his canteen strap. He pulled trigger——

A terrific concussion almost bowled over the drummer and his horse. It displaced the whole platoon. Strawbridge whirled and saw the roofs of the adobes lined with Federal troops firing down on the cavalry.

Men and horses fell beneath continuous volleys. The squadron was falling back toward the river. They acted as if they struggled in the teeth of a furious windstorm. Suddenly some of the men wheeled off toward the river.

Rosales was behind his men, howling and spewing Spanish oaths. He beat the fugitives with the back of his sword. The hatchet-faced lieutenant pointed at the roofs in the uproar, leaning forward toward the enemy. He might have been trying to reach the crashing rifles with the tip of his saber. He was howling for his men to charge.

A flame of sympathy went through Strawbridge for this indomitable knave of an officer. He headed his stallion about in the careening column. He shouted an awful mixture of English and Spanish:

"*Adelanta!* Bore into 'em! *Pronto!* Wipe 'em out, the hellions!"

The powerful horse might have been a stanchion shoring up the column. His mere lunge turned three or four other fugitives toward the enemy. This wheeling movement became the focus of a renewed charge.

Every man took courage from Strawbridge, from the thin-faced reprobate who led them. The column flung itself into the teeth of the fire from the roofs.

The stink and sting of powder-gas jabbed up Strawbridge's nose. The Federals on the roof shone dimly behind a mist of smokeless power. As Strawbridge charged in he could see the face of a man staring at him and the circle of a rifle-muzzle under his right eye.

The cavalry plunged in against the mud walls. Horses smashed against them, reared, fell or squatted trembling at this blank obstruction. What for? Strawbridge did not know. He was furiously angry. He meant to strike——

* * *

ROSALES, the immoral, had directed his charge toward the lowest roof in the whole *playa* side. It was not more than eight feet high. Focusing his fire on this point had cut down the defense just here and left a gap in the line of defenders.

As Rosales dashed up to this building he caught the adobe eaves and succeeded in bellying the roof. A Federal seemed to discharge a gun through his head, but the daredevil wriggled up with his automatic going.

Half a dozen, a dozen other *llaneros* followed. A score gained footing on the low roof. They were amazing horsemen.

The Federals were not deployed on the roofs. They could fire only from the ends of their columns. The knot of cavalry on the red tiles grew, expanded, pressed back the feeble ends of the enemy. The fight had transferred itself from the streets to the housetops, which are the classic stage for South American battles.

In the midst of this extraordinary maneuver Strawbridge found himself trying to scramble up the corner of a building. He could not take off from the saddle. From the ground he could just reach the eave. He clung to the hot adobe and pulled up with all his strength. He kicked and pawed at the corner with knees and feet; but it requires an athlete to arm himself straight up over the eave of a roof. Now and then a bullet flicked adobe dust into his sweating, stinging face.

He tried to kick up a toe and catch it over the edge of the roof. The hot adobe stung his body, and sweat soaked his clothes. With a desperate kick he did succeed in hanging a toe over the cornice.

Just as he was wriggling his heavy body up on the roof something about his hold broke. He fell broadside from where he sagged, about five feet and landed in the litter which collects about Spanish-American huts.

The big drummer lay inert and cursed with every blasphemy to which he could lay his tongue. He cursed Federals, insurgents, house, sun, dust. He invoked the Deity to consign each to its particular ——. He lay inert in burning dust, swearing at a mud wall not six inches from his nose.

The tearing volleys of rifle-shots were drawing a little away from where Strawbridge lay. The quest of the peons for liberty was withdrawing itself somewhat.

Presently the American made an effort to get out of his burning bed. He stirred and found to his discomfiture that one of his arms was numb. He wondered anxiously if he had broken it.

He used his good arm, made shift to sit up, then got to his feet. Then he was surprized to see that his numb hand was bloody. A closer examination showed that the bones in his palm had been shattered by a bullet. That was what flung him from the roof.

He looked at his hand in dismay, turning it over and over. It did not seem to belong to him. He began swearing again mentally. What a —— of an accident to happen to him! For him, Thomas Strawbridge, to get shot! What a cursed piece of luck! He continued cursing his luck with quivering earnestness.

He could not realize that it was his hand attached to his wrist. He kept looking at it. The hand did not pain him in the least. It had no sensation at all.

There had been a certain order kept by the peon cavalry of which Strawbridge had not been aware. Now as he looked about he saw the insurgent horses trotting in a dark group far down the *playa*. They were under the care of hostlers, which the hair-splitting plans of Saturnino no doubt had arranged for just such an emergency as this. Naturally Strawbridge's English stallion had vanished with the herd.

Near at hand lay men and horses dead and wounded. One mule, shot through the back, was dragging itself by its forefeet. Strawbridge picked up his carbine with his good hand and ended its struggles.

For a few minutes the drummer stood looking at this dead mule, at a dead peon some ten steps farther east, then at a sort of windrow of mules and horses and peons where the cavalry had hesitated before they charged.

These were the men whom Strawbridge had seen only an hour ago embracing and weeping over their loves; now they lay in all sorts of twisted and grotesque postures; already the green flies were buzzing about the mouths their sweethearts had kissed. Such was the outcome of their fight for liberty. This was the freedom they had found, these brown exhalations of the llanos, who rose up out of the earth, fought, struggled, plotted, murdered and sank into the llanos again. And all their pain and fury had ever done for four centuries was to exchange one dictator for another.

A profound weariness came over Strawbridge. The crotches of his legs, which the horse had skinned, began burning again. An unlocalized throbbing set up somewhere in his wounded arm. A fly came buzzing about, and the drummer waved it away.

Then he examined his wound again, and as he looked he grew sick at heart. He would be crippled for the rest of his life. Never before had a mishap befallen his big, comfortable body; and now his hand was gone, and he could never have it again. This seemed to Strawbridge the most tragic thing which had happened in the battle of San Geronimo, that he, who was such a busy man, who needed his hand so much, should have lost it.

With an American's dread of germs he wanted to tie up his wound to prevent infection. With this object in view he looked anxiously about over the shambles.

The wharf was deserted by the living. The small *drogistas* which usually are found along Latin-American streets were all shut like blind eyes. Sounds of the fighting, a little softened, came from the direction of *casa fuerte*.

A rather wild notion came to Strawbridge to follow the soldiers and obtain his dressing from the medical corps of the insurgents; then he recalled that they had no medical corps. They had brought along with them a priest to save the dead, but they had not even a first-aid pack for the wounded.

BEYOND the row of palms down the center of the *playa* the drummer presently observed a *goleta*, one of those queer Orinocan schooners with preternaturally tall masts and a queer little square sail swung down under her jib. She was lying close to the bank and evidently was stuck on a sand-bar because her owner was on deck working with a long spar trying to pry her off.

This sort of craft often carried passengers on the river, and the American felt sure she would possess some of the simpler surgical aids. So he picked up his carbine and set off at a painful pace to the waterside.

When the drummer passed the row of palms and appeared moving definitely toward the schooner the man on deck stopped poling. He peered through the glare at the American and next moment dabbed out of sight below deck.

His action cheered Strawbridge. The drummer felt that the skipper had understood the situation and had rushed below for his surgical dressings to have them ready by his arrival.

This thoughtfulness put a little better heart into the wounded man as he moved shakily along through the glare and heat. He could not help thinking of the inherent courtesy in all Venezuelans. It was perhaps not sincere every time, the American thought, but it was as soothing as a poultice.

Strawbridge moved gratefully toward the *goleta* when the skipper reappeared on deck with a stick—no, it was an outrageously long gun. As Strawbridge watched him curiously, he leveled it at the drummer and fired pointblank. The bullet whispered past the American's ear and plunked into a heap of balata balls behind him.

Strawbridge stopped and stared bewildered. The skipper was feverishly reloading his extraordinary gun. It seemed to be some sort of single-shot arrangement. The drummer was amazed and suddenly outraged.

"Here!" he shouted. "What the —— do you mean?"

The master of the schooner lifted his weapon again to correct his faulty shot when the salesman instinctively dived behind some bags of tonka beans. He peered over the tops, still scarcely able to believe his senses, when the captain fired again and something nicked the American's hat.

At this second discharge the drummer went furious. To be fired on casually and without any provocation whatever! He flung his carbine along the top of the bags with his good arm, leveled down and fired at the captain. At his first movement, however, the sailor had dropped down and disappeared below the garboard of the schooner.

The American fired two vicious shots at the place where the captain must have been prone. Then he glared at the vacant deck with the bitterest sense of injury he had ever known. To be fired upon when he was seeking aid and comfort—to be shot at like a rat!

His feeling of injury became so intense he burst out cursing the invisible sailor, loading him with every obscene and profane qualification. With his carbine leveled over the bags he swore furiously for two or three minutes.

Then he began to repeat his oaths, and presently fizzled out through a mere sense of rhetoric. Then he damned his enemy for a coward and invited him to stand up like a man and get killed.

Passed a slight interim, and a voice behind the gunwale, but considerably removed from where the fellow had disappeared, called out—

"*Señor!*"

Through some queer reaction this placating "*señor*" added fuel to Strawbridge's wrath. He broke out again, howling, swearing and urging the captain to get up and be shot.

But the captain conducted his end of the conversation from cover.

"*Señor*," he repeated without any resentment in his tone, "are you not a *revolutionista?*"

"No!" yelled Strawbridge. "I'm a decent American citizen down in this —— -fired country——"

He continued this strain upward half a minute.

When he became silent again the hidden one ejaculated mildly:

"*Caramba!* How should I know you were an *Americano, señor?*"

"Well, by ——, you ought to look who you're shooting at!"

"Up this Orinoco valley, *señor*, if you look too long before you shoot, you may not get to shoot at all."

"Huh— I bet you knew I was an American all the time."

"No, really, *señor*. Why should I shoot at an *Americano?*"

Strawbridge could think of no reason why any one should want to shoot at an American. During the silence which followed, the sailor asked in a placating tone.

"May I stand up, *Señor Americano?* This deck is very warm indeed."

The drummer relinquished his notion of killing the man.

"All right, get up," he conceded. "We're not doing any good like this."

And Strawbridge walked sorely out from behind the tonka beans at the same time the captain sat up and then stood up.

◆

THE sailor was a brown man, dripping with sweat and with smudges of pitch on his clothes which he had got from the seams in the deck. He had a good-humored face, rather scared just now, and he looked curiously at Strawbridge as he mopped his face and neck with a red handkerchief.

"Will you come aboard my ship, *señor?*" he inquired courteously, getting his spar again and running it out to where Strawbridge could wade a little and reach the end of it.

The drummer walked aboard.

The moment the drummer stepped on deck the captain began hastily:

"Now, *señor*, if you would be kind enough to lend me a little help— I am trying to float the *Concepcion Imaculata*."

"What's the rush?" asked the salesman, looking at his wounded hand.

The fellow swung his weight against the spar.

"*Caramba!* If the *revolutionistas* catch me here they will strip my poor *Concepcion Imaculata* to her last sheet."

"Steal your stuff!" echoed Strawbridge. "What makes you think so?"

"Lightning of ——!" cried the ship master. "They are *ladrones*, bandits, cutpurses! Come, give a poor man a hand, *señor!*"

He was shoving now with all his strength.

"You're wrong about that!" defended the drummer warmly. "I know those fellows. Came up here with 'em. Just as clever a set of ——"

"You know them?"

"Sure I do. Came down from Canalejos with 'em."

"But I heard they were thieves and robbers."

Strawbridge doubled up his good fist and began making strong, convincing, selling gestures with it.

"You can take this from me, *señor*. The revolutionists are just as high-toned a set of men as you'll find in Venezuela. I honestly believe General Fombombo has higher ideals than any public man I ever knew; and as for that Coronel Saturnino—say, you got to hand it to him for courtesy and politeness. So don't get all fussed about your boat. You're safe as a church right here."

Strawbridge paused impressively and then added—

"Say, can you do anything for this —— hand of mine?"

The captain was convinced. Perhaps of all the men in the world the American salesman has a style of talk the most sincere of sound. The captain visibly put by his doubts of the revolutionists and then looked at the hand.

"*Caramba*, that's a bad punch!"

"Yeh, tough luck."

A faint suspicion crossed the brown man.

"You were not fighting, *señor?* You are not a *revolutionista* yourself?"

"——, no. I got this following the troops around. I wanted to see how they worked."

"*Ca!* Are you a military attaché, *Señor Americano?*"

The schooner owner was visibly impressed, but Strawbridge straightened.

"Say, do I look like a —— diplomatic lounge lizard sunning himself in some South American post? By ——, I'm a man. I'm an American salesman down here investigating a point of business. I sell hardware myself. I make this territory once a year. What's your line?"

The captain of the *Concepcion Imaculata* opened his eyes at a man who so scorned a Governmental position. His respect mounted. In fact the captain was born into the South American cult of respect for office. He had never before met the North American's thoroughgoing contempt for politics and politicians, and the fact that it is barely respectable to be anything less than a Senator in the United States, and often not that.

So now the sailor introduced himself with circumspection to so important a personage. He was Noe Vargas, commandant of the *Concepcion Imaculata* sailing out of Coro. He had cruised up the Orinoco to buy tonka beans and balata and would carry them to Curaçao to be reshipped to Holland. In fact much of the beans and balata which Strawbridge saw lying on the wharf was consigned to the *Concepcion Imaculata*, if only Noe could succeed in lading his vessel.

All this information was delightful to Strawbridge. In fact this was the first conversation which he really enjoyed since coming to Venezuela. And while Captain Vargas was not particularly fond of talking of sago, copra, cassava, guarapo and such articles of commerce, still he was flattered that so great a man as Strawbridge should deign to listen to him at all.

As they talked, Captain Vargas made shift to bind up Strawbridge's hand. He had no surgical linen but he thought the tail of one of his shirts would do. Strawbridge objected on the score of germs. The captain assured him that was impossible because only the day before he had washed this shirt which he proposed to use, in the Orinoco, and it was a well-known fact that running water purified itself once every thousand yards.

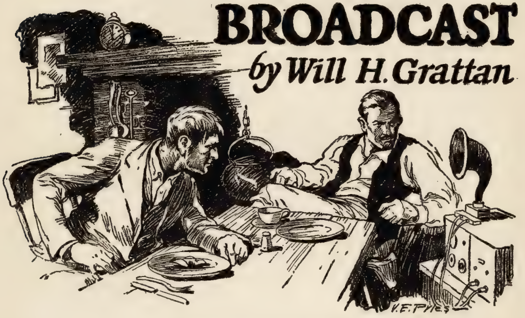
"And think how pure the Orinoco must be, *señor*," added the captain, "for the Orinoco has flowed for thousands and thousands of miles!"

So Strawbridge went below into a smelly cabin. The captain found the shirt he meant in a bag of dunnage, pulled it out, cut off the tail and bound up the drummer's hand.

TO BE CONTINUED

BROADCAST

by Will H. Grattan



Author of "Down Devil's Cliff"

JOE TEAGLER'S dream of years was realized. He had struck pay dirt in his claim high on the scarred side of Old Tiptop. A rich vein of gold quartz had been uncovered, shouldering far back into the mountain, how far could only be guessed.

Another man would have been in ecstasy in contemplation of the fortune to be his. Teagler felt merely serene. He cast a glance over his shack of rough boards and logs, erected on the mountain side, to be handy to his claim.

"I'm goin' to miss that old shanty," he ruminated. "That bit of porch there is gettin' mighty rickety, I see. Right after lunch I've got to fix that middle prop. If I don't that company feller is likely to take a spill down the mountain. Scarcely seems a proper way to close a deal, even if he does try to 'gyp' me."

Teagler chuckled softly as he started into the shack to prepare lunch. But before he reached the door, he came to a sudden stop.

"Hello, old-timer."

The words were low, but something in the voice penetrated Teagler's consciousness like an electric shock. He had heard no sound of any man or thing approaching. Yet the voice came from just back of his left shoulder.

Teagler turned.

"Well?" he abruptly inquired.

The thought struck him that this might

be the mining company man, come to deal for his property. He discarded this idea at once. Not only was the hour too early, but the stranger bore no appearance of a mining engineer.

"Nice place here."

In the tone, Teagler was almost certain he detected a subtle mockery. So he did not answer, waited for the other to say more.

The stranger had a flabby look. His beard was several days old, black and heavy. A pair of very dark eyes shifted from Teagler's face, roamed the mountainside and the shanty's exterior. The fellow was attired in a dark brown suit, shapeless now and caked with dirt about the shoe-tops, but the prospector was aware that the garment was of expensive cut. The man's felt hat retained dapper lines.

As Teagler eyed him, the newcomer whipped out a dirty handkerchief and dabbed with it at his perspiring face.

"That was some climb, old-timer," he asserted.

"Yeah?"

Teagler looked at the stranger's shoes. "Town" shoes. Rubber-soled. That was why they had given no sound as the man toiled up the trail. The fellow had a cat-like appearance, too.

"I'd give a lot for a bite to eat and something to drink. Anything. Water, even."

The stranger gave a short, sharp laugh. The laugh made plain a deep, white scar starting near the right temple and disappearing into the stubble of his beard.

"Come in," invited Teagler, and motioned to the steps, composed of two ends of logs.

Once inside, the stranger's shifty eyes rested on the picture of a slim, young girl in a velveteen gown and braids.

"My daughter," said Teagler, who had been following the fellow's roaming glance.

"Oh," remarked the stranger. "Good-looking kid. Where's she now?"

"School," replied the prospector, "back East."

"Fine."

The guest's gaze swerved to Teagler's preparation for lunch. He licked dry lips.

"Set in," invited Teagler.

Ravenously, the man partook of the food. After several mouthfuls of the meat he looked up inquiringly.

"Venison?" he asked.

Teagler nodded.

"Got him just back of the rimrock down Cincher Creek."

He looked at the battered alarm-clock on a shelf. The hands met at twelve o'clock.

"Excuse me," said Teagler. "Music with our meals."

He moved over to the wall, to the horn the stranger had observed and reached for a switch.

"Radio?" asked the stranger. "I noticed the fixings."

For answer, Teagler turned on the switch. A moment's manipulation and a raucous voice was heard closing an announcement. Then came a jazzy dance tune.

"Slick," said the stranger, "way up here back of nowhere."

Teagler grinned. He was proud of his radiophone.

The visitor washed down his venison with large gulps of coffee.

The jazz tune ended. The raucous voice began again. It was somewhat clearer by this time.

"I am asked," it said, "to make this announcement by the chief of police of Denver, Colorado. A reward of two thousand dollars—two thousand dollars—is offered for the capture of one "Snapper" Kirk, wanted for the theft of a diamond necklace the property of Ellsworth Coster, of Denver.

"Kirk is described as about five feet eight inches in height. He has dark complexion and dark eyes, stocky in build. He was dressed when last seen in a dark brown suit and brown felt hat. Kirk can be easily recognized by a deep, white scar on his right cheek, starting near the temple and ranging downward for more than two inches. Send any information to chief of police, Denver."

Teagler moved the platter of venison closer to his unexpected guest.

"Eat plenty," he bade.

Teagler attempted a casual conversation. His guest eyed him, but answered only in monosyllables. The radio program ended, with the giving of live stock quotations.

"Interested in mines?" asked the prospector.

"Gold?" demanded the stranger.

Teagler nodded.

"Got something to show you," he said, and arose.

"I wouldn't," came the harsh voice of the other man.

Slowly, Teagler turned back to face the

stranger. He looked into the muzzle of a nickel-plated revolver. The weapon shook slightly in the diner's hand, but the fellow's eyes were coldly malignant.

"What's the matter?" inquired the prospector.

"You know —— well," was the answer, followed by an outburst of cursing. "Don't think you can fool me. I watched you when that —— contraption was talking. Now, you sit down."

Teagler slowly obeyed.

"I'll see what you were after," went on the stranger.

He crossed to a shelf, which supported a long drawer. Keeping partly turned toward Teagler, he opened the drawer, reached in suddenly, and drew out a big Colt's.

"Thought so," he muttered. "Well, I turned the tables right enough, eh?"

Teagler made no reply. The other returned and stood over the older man.

"Talk up, why don't you?" he demanded, shoving one gun close to the prospector's face. "You know who I am, now, don't you?"

"Things sort of indicate you're that 'Snapper' Kirk," replied Teagler.

"Well, I am," rapped back the stranger. "What of it?"

" 'Pears like that's for you to say," evenly retorted Teagler. "Now you've introduced yourself, my name's Teagler—Joe Teagler."

Inwardly, he was not so cool. That radio message meant more to him than the stranger realized. Teagler's mind worked rapidly but evolved no way of circumventing the rascal before him. It would be nearly two hours before the mining company man would be due. Teagler had small hope that Kirk would remain that long. Moreover, the prospector did not like the calculating look in his captor's eyes.

The fellow moved away from him now, one gun, Teagler's, stuck in his pocket, the other ready in his right hand. He rummaged around among a collection of cans and miscellany in a corner of the shanty.

"You missed something in that drawer," spoke Teagler. "I was going after some nuggets. Better take another look."

"Want to trade, eh?" sneered Kirk.

Almost reluctantly, he drew his glance from the collection he had been exploring and went to the drawer. The revolver covered Teagler continuously. From the drawer, Kirk now drew a chamois bag. He emptied it, a dozen nuggets dropping out.

"That's from my mine," said Teagler, intent on interesting the stranger in something besides the problem he knew the jewel thief was facing.

"——," retorted Kirk. "They look mighty sick beside this."

He fumbled in an inside pocket and brought out something wrapped in tissue paper. He unwound the paper and held up a glorious necklace. A streak of sunlight, pouring through a tiny window, struck sparkles that dazzled the prospector's eyes.

"Mighty pretty," agreed Teagler. "Got any ideas how you're goin' to get rid of it?"

"Plenty," answered Kirk. "That'll be easy. Curse my luck, though! Think of running into a radio outfit up here."

His hands trembled as he returned the necklace to its wrappings and then to his pocket.

"I don't want your —— nuggets," he said.

His gaze seemed drawn back irresistibly to the cans in the corner.

"Don't suppose there's another radio outfit in a hundred miles," he snarled.

Teagler smiled slightly.

"Guess you're right," he acknowledged.

Kirk stooped and lifted an old oil can, its spout spearing a piece of potato. The can seemed to fascinate him. He plucked away the potato and tipped the can. He poured out a few drops on the floor. Then he put down the can and his eyes turned back to Teagler.

"You got yourself in this," he muttered, "with that cursed wireless thing of yours."

Teagler's muscles tautened as he read the other's thoughts.

"You'd take a chance like that?" he drawled.

The prospector realized fear, nor was he ashamed of it. What an inglorious ending this would be, to his years of hopes.

"I'd as soon swing as go to the pen for a dozen years," replied Kirk. "Besides, they'd never catch me. No one has seen me here. They couldn't possibly connect me with it."

He was arguing with himself, out loud, Teagler decided. The prospector's mind worked under feverish pressure. He sought to get back to calmer thinking.

"How do you know I'd tell?" he asked.

Kirk laughed harshly, mockingly.

"Why wouldn't you?" he demanded. "Of

course, you'd tell. Think any promise you made would be worth—that."

The crook snapped his fingers.

"I know Coster," said Teagler.

"Oh, you do! That's why you wouldn't tell him, eh? Or, maybe, you'd induce him to let me off easy?"

Teagler shook his head.

"I should say not," continued Kirk. "He hasn't got me yet. I ran the risk to get these little pretties and I'm going to cash in on them. You're not going to stop me, either."

He reached for a coil of rope on the wall and approached Teagler.

"Put your hands behind your back!" he ordered.

In a little more than a minute, the prospector was securely tied, hands and feet.

"I told you I knew Coster," insisted Teagler, as Kirk draw taut the last knots. "There's something yet in that drawer you'll like to see. Open a little black box in there. It's unlocked. You'll find a paper that will interest you. Maybe, it will save your life, from the noose. If you see that, you'll think I ain't so likely to tell Coster."

Kirk pulled out the designated paper, glanced at it hastily; then he read it a second time, more carefully.

"Now, you see," urged Teagler.

"This says Joseph Teagler is wanted for embezzlement of $25,000 from this same guy, Ellsworth Coster," said Kirk, wonderingly. "You said your name was Teagler. That right?"

The thief glanced sharply from the picture on the circular before him to the prospector's face. The photograph was of a man many years younger, clean-shaven, but the resemblance was unmistakable.

"That's right," echoed Teagler.

"Twelve years ago," went on Kirk. "Well, what about it? What's that got to do with me?"

"Here I am, and I never did no time for that job," said Teagler. "This is a pretty safe place up here. You headed right, Kirk. I was workin' for Coster, sellin' farm lands. I got my hands on some cash that looked easy, and I beat it. We could be partners——"

Kirk was thinking rapidly.

"Where's the stuff?" he demanded.

"What—" began Teagler.

"The dough, the boodle, the twenty-five grand," insisted Kirk.

"Oh, I've got a cache, all right," said the prospector. "Don't you worry about that. Now, you see why I won't turn you in."

"I see more than that," declared Kirk. "You've got just one chance for your life, partner. That's to dig up that dough. Cash is what I need to make a getaway."

Teagler appeared to be deliberating.

"All right," he said, at last. "I'll show you."

"In the shanty here?" asked Kirk.

Teagler shook his head.

"Out by the mine. I'll show you."

"Any tricks and I'll blow you to everlastin' ——" threatened the thief.

He placed his gun on the table while he untied the hands of his captive. Kirk's intentions were unchanged. He would take no chances on leaving Teagler alive, less so now that cash was in prospect which would help him to a safe getaway.

He retrieved his revolver and pushed Teagler to his feet.

"Go ahead," he ordered, "and, remember, no tricks."

Teagler shook out his legs, cramped by the tight binding. His hands still tied behind him, he walked out the door, wobbling a bit, as if dazed.

Kirk came close behind him.

Teagler trudged across the porch, put down a foot to the log steps and then, so quickly that Kirk at first believed he had accidentally stumbled, he dropped toward the ground. A quick serve and, with all his strength, Teagler drove his body against the middle prop of the porch, the prop he had noticed was weakened.

With a loud rending of timbers, the porch crashed to earth. Over the narrow ledge along which the trail led to the cabin entrance, catapulted the porch, "Snapper" Kirk, old Joe Teagler, and an avalanche of dirt and stone, down the steep mountain slope.

Kirk's loud curses changed to shrieks of dismay, as he saw his peril. Teagler had rushed toward the back of the porch rapidly enough to keep from being pinned helplessly under the timbers. Kirk's surprize had handicapped him. Teagler, his wits keen, flattened himself against a heap of rocks that resisted the rush of the home-made avalanche.

He heard Kirk's cries growing fainter, as the man plunged downward. Teagler was aware, however, that about two hundred feet below the avalanche would end in a thicket of jack pine and rocks.

Frantically, Teagler severed the rope about his wrists by rubbing the hemp on a sharp ledge of rock until he could pull it apart. Then he plunged back to the cabin, drew himself up to the door, obtained a shotgun concealed at the rear of the shanty, and hurried by a winding trail to the point where he expected to find Kirk.

He was just in time. The fellow was twisting and moaning as he emerged from unconsciousness. His eyes twitched open, to see Teagler squatted near him, covering him with the shotgun.

"I'll take that gun of mine in your pocket first," directed Teagler. "Never mind, I'll get it." Kirk tried to move an arm, then groaned in pain.

"Now, the necklace."

Under a torrent of Kirk's curses, the prospector reached in the pocket for the gems.

"That's right," sneered Kirk. "It ain't enough for you to beat Coster out of his money. You've got to play hog and keep the jewels, too. How you goin' to cash 'em, huh? You asked me that. I'm askin' you."

"That's easy," answered Teagler. "I'm going to cash them with Coster himself. He's my best friend in the world. I told you he never punished me for that trick of mine. No, he gave me another chance, that's why.

"I got away, got as far as the Mexican border. They grabbed me there, thanks to that circular. I had most of the money with me. Coster wouldn't prosecute. He found out all about me and he wouldn't prosecute.

"That isn't all. He's paying my girl's way through school. He staked me up here. Salt of the earth, Ellsworth Coster. Why, he gave me that radio set, Kirk, when he came up here huntin' last fall. This is my chance to pay him back.

"Sorry if I misled you about this up here bein' my hide-out."

"Then there isn't any cache?" demanded Kirk. Teagler grinned.

"Well, your thinking there was saved my life," he said. "I staked everything on getting you out on that porch. It was you that was the greedy one, Snapper."

HIDDEN GUNS

by Henry W. Patterson

NEVER within the memory of the oldest *voyageur* had there been such a snowfall in the Trois Lacs country. During the latter part of December and all through January the gray clouds hung low over the tree-tops, pouring down their load of fine crystals with sullen persistency, while the north wind, sweeping through the forest, piled the flying flakes high against all obstacles, driving them firmly into each crack and crevice.

The two trappers on Cañon Creek fought the drifts for many days in an effort to keep their lines clear. At last, however, when they woke one fearfully cold morning to find not only the north window but also the doorway on the other side of the little cabin covered with hard-packed drifts that rose clear to the peak of the squat roof, they laid aside their spruce-wood shovels with a sigh of resignation and relief.

Jim Henderson, gnarled and grizzled by years of life in the wilderness, dug a narrow tunnel to daylight. While he went to the creek and chopped the water-hole clear of ice, his partner, a young tenderfoot named Nick Hartley, cleared the snow from the wood-pile and sent a good number of dry logs down the slanting chute into the cabin. The men then made a final round of the traps and lifted those not already frozen and too deeply buried. Thereafter the daily trip for water and more infrequent attacks on the wood-pile were the only breaks in the dull routine of eating and sleeping.

During the first few days the partners loafed about, enjoying to the full the perfect relaxation that comes with the knowledge that work is for the time being not only futile but practically impossible.

Time passed slowly, however, and gradually the atmosphere of content began to change to one of restlessness. Nick, who had never before been snowed up, was the first to feel the irritability that generally accompanies a long period of enforced inactivity. One morning as he crept down the tunnel behind a pile of firewood he said—

"Seems to me you picked a punk place to build this cabin—right under a bank and only open on the south, where any fool ought to know a north wind 'd drift worst."

Henderson knew very well that he had made a mistake in picking the spot, but he did not care to have the fact called to his attention.

"Oh, I did, did I?" he flared in sudden heat. "Well, it's comf'table, ain't it? I ain't noticed you packin' up yet. Durned glad to come in here, you was, last Fall. If you don't like it you know what you can do—an' where you can go, too!"

"Who said anything about not likin' it? I didn't. You know you foozled it when you located here, or you wouldn't holler like that before you're hurt."

"Shut up!" blustered the old man. "You make me plum tired. If you had any backbone at all, you'd have kept your mouth shut in the first place, an' not started whinin' like a kid."

Nick suppressed a surge of wrath and turned away, lest he rouse his partner's temper any further. He did not know that this was Henderson's method of weathering a long snowstorm—a hot argument every now and then to act as a sort of safety valve, relieving the pressure of the bile of boredom before it had accumulated to a dangerous degree.

Henderson made a few more attempts to rouse the younger man, but when he discovered that he could not do it, he too grew silent and increasingly angry. He resented Nick's attitude, and Nick was quick to note the fact, and to feel a like resentment not unmixed with apprehension as Henderson, his pride forbidding him any longer to rage openly, took more and more to muttering and cursing under his breath.

Nick worried gloomily over the change in his partner, not realizing that a day or so of work on the trap-lines, and a few more pelts added to the pile in the corner, would serve to bring both men back to normal cheerfulness. He sulked and moped, and watched Henderson with hostile eyes.

SUCH a state of affairs could not continue for long. A belated thaw had at last set in. The snow was ceasing, and a few more days would see a resumption of outdoor work, when a final flare-up occurred. It was late afternoon. Henderson rolled out of his bunk to go to the creek for water and found Hartley gazing at the snow-bound north window. The old man laughed, a sneering, mirthless cackle.

"Enjoyin' the view?" he asked.

Nick had been thinking of digging away enough to let some light into the cabin, now that the snow had stopped drifting, but after that remark he would willingly have died first. He grew red and tried not to notice the question.

"Well, now," went on Henderson, enjoying the situation, "I always liked that view myself. It's so much better 'n gazin' at your sour-bellied features."

He picked up a pail and his snowshoes and added with elaborate politeness:

"Possibly you could tear yourself away long enough to git some wood? There ain't any left, as you'll see if you can wrench your eyes away from that soul-fillin' picture of Nature at her best."

This was a long and difficult speech for Henderson, and he felt that he had done a rather neat bit of work in getting it off so smoothly. He chuckled again as he opened the door and started up the tunnel.

When he heard that laugh, something snapped in Nick's brain. He whirled in a frenzy and rushed to the door.

"By —— I've stood all I'm goin' to from you!" he cried wildly. "You keep out of here or I'll beat the livin' lights out o' you."

His voice rose to a shriek as he poured out his rage in a flood of vituperation. Henderson, standing at the top of the tunnel, went flaming hot with a fierce joy.

"Come out here an' say that!" he yelled. "Come out, —— you!"

At that moment Nick, frantically eager to obey the summons, dived into the tunnel. His head and shoulders struck its roof. A slight upward surge as he plunged, and the snow slumped in with a dull rumble. Nick was swept back into the cabin by a miniature avalanche, and Henderson stood staring at the tumbled groove where the tunnel had been.

In the next few instants the old man's opinion of Nick underwent a radical change. His exhilarating wrath became red fury, born of the conviction that his partner was a coward—who had played a sneaking but effective trick that left Henderson ridiculously helpless. As this realization swept over him he grew dizzy and swayed on his feet, while the veins stood out on his purple neck. When he could control his limbs he floundered to the chimney and began to roar inarticulate masses of blasphemy at the man below. At last he managed to form a coherent sentence.

"Wait!" he bellowed, sobbing. "Great —— just wait 'til I get you! If I don't rid the earth o' your —— drivellin' carcass. Coward! ——'s too good for the likes o' you! Hangin's too good! Shootin's too—Oh, gimme my gun! I'll shoot you down like a yeller dog! I'll drill you like a sieve! Just wait!"

He surged back to the tunnel as the smoke from the fire strangled him and, snatching up a snowshoe, began to dig furiously.

Nick, listening to this tirade of abuse, began to feel a panicky terror. Henderson's gasping, choking voice sounded perfectly demoniacal as it reverberated in the chimney, and the frightful threats were delivered with the frenzy of a raving maniac.

The long siege had been too much, thought Nick. The old man had gone suddenly crazy—crazy with the lust for blood. Weren't the papers always full of stories of men who shot people in bursts of insanity and then grew sane again? If Henderson could get his gun now, he would surely do for him, unless he shot Henderson first—or unless—but he didn't want to run. He must do something, though!

His partner's snowshoe was crunching nearer and nearer the snow-filled doorway, while the digger gasped great lungfuls of air into his heaving chest. Nick stood hesitating for another moment, glancing about the dim-lit room while the candle on the mantel spluttered and wavered. Then he ran to the shelf by the bunks and with trembling hands gathered up the two revolvers, the rifle and all the cartridges.

Three minutes later Henderson burst in. Nick stood waiting for him with set face in front of the fire-place. The old man kicked the little pile of snow to one side and shut the door carefully. Then he whirled and charged across the cabin. His partner met him half-way.

The desperate rough-and-tumble fight that followed raged for an hour, all about the little room, under the bunks, almost in the fire. Stools flew everywhere, extra clothing fell from the walls and got tangled up with the writhing swelter of arms and legs, ashes swirled, while the men panted and tugged, punched gasping, short-armed punches, neither giving an inch, seemingly as strong and fresh as ever.

Then of a sudden as they rose together Nick made a terrific effort to hit the old man on the jaw. The old man dodged back sharply and the fist swished harmlessly past. Nick half-turned and stumbled forward, unable to overcome the momentum of the blow. He blundered heavily against Henderson, who had not regained his balance. They crashed to the floor, rolled apart, and lay flat in utter exhaustion.

Henderson at length drew himself with much grunting to a sitting posture. He sighed as his eyes took in the wreckage of the room.

"What a couple o' durn fools we be, anyway," he remarked heavily.

Nick rolled over and met his partner's wry grin with a hoarse chuckle. He too sighed as he surveyed the hodge-podge of furniture and clothes sprinkled with ashes. The old man staggered to his feet and made for the door to let some fresh air into the reeking room. As he stepped over Hartley he stopped and reached down a sweaty hand.

"An' I figgered you was a coward," he remarked. "Man, you're a wild cat!"

"Aw, heck," said Nick as he grasped the hand and pulled himself erect, "you'd 'a' done me up easy, if you hadn't been all in from diggin'. An' say, Jim," he snickered again—"I thought you'd gone crazy! Honest I did. I was that scared I——"

Henderson had reached out to unlatch the door when the wooden handle lifted seemingly of its own volition. The heavy door swung inward with a rush, and three men leaped into the shack.

"Put 'em up!" said the leader, greasy-looking and fat.

"What—" began Henderson in utter bewilderment.

Then he caught the gleam of an automatic, and his hands rose reluctantly above his head. Nick, after a suddenly suppressed motion toward the shelf, followed suit dumbly.

THE other invaders came forward, each with a snowshoe thong formed into a noose. They deftly slipped these over the upstretched hands, drew them tight with a jerk and tied them.

"Now, then, hands down—way down," went on the fat man.

The thongs' free ends were tied with painstaking care to their wearers' ankles.

"Bring 'em over here where we can look at 'em."

The fat man walked to the hearth. The prisoners were pushed after him.

"See here," said Henderson, as his tall, dark jailer finished searching him and started a thorough investigation of the cabin. "What's the meanin' o' this, anyway?"

"Why," responded the fat man in a confidential tone, "we're hungry, see? So we decided to ask ourselves to dinner with you and your buddy."

Nick's guardian came back from his inspection of the premises.

"Say, Cap," he said, "there's plenty of food, all right, but there ain't no guns here."

"Have you looked everywhere?"

"Sure, an' so's Tony. Why was you so leery o' jumpin' these boids?"

"What'd ye jump 'em for anyway?" grumbled Tony.

"I'll answer both them questions while we rest a bit," said the fat man indulgently. "As to jumpin' 'em when they're fightin', Perry, you never want to do that. It's takin' a chance, because there's generly a gun that both's tryin' to grab, an' it may go off any time right in your face. An' Tony, didn't I give you my reasons for jumpin' 'em at all before we got here? You'll know when you've been workin' at this work as long as I have that news can travel fast—mighty fast. How was we to know they wouldn't recognize us, from a description or somethin'? How was we to know one of 'em wasn't a bull? An' lastly, how was we to know but what they might try to stick *us* up, if we didn't get the hop on 'em—an' us just oozin' cash? We couldn't answer a one of them questions 'til we seen what was what, could we? Play it safe, boys," he ended, patronizingly conscious of his superior astuteness, "an' you'll always come out on top, even if you do make it unpleasant for the other feller sometimes. See?"

He teetered ponderously on the heels of his moccasins and drew forth a silver case.

"Have one?" he offered, holding it out to Henderson and Hartley. "No? Sorry."

He lit a cigaret with a flourish. The old man paused in his snarling efforts to twist out of his bonds and coughed savagely, but his partner lay quiet, a scared look in his eyes.

"Now," said the leader of the gang, "let's rustle some grub. Here—" he stirred Henderson with his foot—"where's the bread-box?"

"Get your foot off me!" burst out Henderson. "What kind of a game you tryin' to pull off, anyway? Come into a man's cabin with your hifalutin' gabble an' tie him up. Lemme go!"

"Will you rustle some grub if I do?"

"Not by a dum sight I won't!" the old man roared. "I'd rustle you an' your dirty gang to —— out o' here, if I had a gun!"

"Yeah—if," taunted the fat man. Then, "Why ain't you got one?" he snapped suspiciously.

"That young idiot lost it somewheres, that's why," gritted Henderson, while the "young idiot" gave fervent though silent thanks for his partner's quick wit.

The fat man turned to Hartley, who shrank away.

"Well, you goin' to act nice an' sociable an' cook us up some grub? We got to move on pretty quick, an' it'll be all for the best if you hustle about it."

"Yes, sir," said Nick eagerly. "I'll do my best for you."

"Blasted little slob," muttered Henderson.

"There, that's something like," said the fat man heartily.

He was enjoying himself thoroughly. His manner became even more grand as he continued:

"It ain't every man has the privilege o' waitin' on me. I cut quite a figure, down where I come from." He gestured, his cigaret held jauntily between his pudgy fingers. "Why, me an' my pals cleaned up a whole fortune in just two hours, not so many nights ago. Oh, it's all right Perry," he reassured his companion, who had turned with a warning oath from his task of loosening Nick's bonds so he could move about. "I doubt if anybody's goin' to look for us up this way, an' I know our friends here won't squeal on us."

He leered.

"Tony's a good pard when it comes to disappearin', eh Tony?"

He chuckled again, glowing more and more in the light of his own importance as Tony grinned in a pleased way.

"Say," he said to Nick, who was digging out some meal from the food-box, "hustle that grub, you hear?"

"Yes, sir, I am, as fast as I can," answered Hartley.

Henderson at this point made a furious effort to free himself, fairly bursting with rage.

"That's right," said the fat man, glancing at Henderson with a tolerant smile. "Now let's fix the fire. Gettin' a bit chilly, seems to me."

Nick started toward the fire-place.

"There's no more wood," he said.

"Go get some, then, don't stand there like a fool."

"I'll have to dig for it."

"Better let me go, Cap," said Perry.

Nick looked at him in ill-concealed relief.

"No!" snapped the fat man, noting the glance. "What the —— are you buttin' in here for? Let the boy go. He knows where 't is, an' I'll bet my shirt he won't try to run off in all this snow an' cold. You bring in all the snowshoes an' duffle while I turn him loose."

As Perry came back with a load of packs and snowshoes the leader said to Nick:

"Now, then, young feller, don't go tryin' any monkeyshines. You bring that wood in peaceable, or——"

Quick as light his right hand fluttered and a bullet spat into the threshold of the door, so that Perry's descending foot covered the hole.

Even Henderson, crouched against the wall and watching his partner with veiled speculation and anxiety, was impressed by this display. He drew in his breath sharply. Nick was frankly frightened.

"See?" said the fat man, replacing the automatic in his hip pocket. "An' Perry an' Tony are most as good as that, too. It's easier to draw from a holster," he added in explanation.

"Yes, sir," answered Nick. "I'll be as quick as I can."

His bonds were removed and he hurried out, rubbing his wrists.

"Shut that door!" roared the fat man.

Nick rushed back and closed it.

The fat man turned to Henderson.

"How long will it take him to get that wood?" he inquired. "No fooling, now!"

His hand flickered as Henderson hesitated.

"Not very long," said the old man hastily. " 'Bout five-ten minutes, I guess. He's got to burrer down into the snow, that's all."

THE fat man walked about the room restlessly, glancing here and there. The candle sputtered. The graying coals of the fire settled with a whispered crunch.

"What'll ye do wid dese fellers, Cap?" inquired Tony after a while.

"Just wait till we've had some food, an' we'll decide," answered the fat man. "Say, though, it's lucky you knew about this place, Tony. I'm near starved."

He grinned as he continued:

"If you birds hadn't been fightin' I dunno as we'd 'a' found you at that, in all this —— snow. Too dark to see much, but Tony heard a thumpin' an' crashin' along the bank o' the river somewhere, so we breezed over. We come away in a bit of a hurry from where we last was, an' we're in a bit of a hurry to git where we're goin', up to Tony's place, so this makes it pretty nice. Where the ——'s that other guy? I'm gittin' cold."

Tony loosed his revolver in its holster and started silently for the door, but just then Nick's voice was heard, asking them to open up. He stamped shivering into the room, covered with snow from head to heels, carrying a great load of logs.

"Easy does it, young feller," said the fat man, watching like a cat as Hartley staggered to the hearth.

Tony and Perry closed in behind him, ready for anything.

Nick squatted down and dropped the logs carefully before the fire. He selected some small, dry splints and put them on the coals, blowing gently until they burst into flame. He gave one quick glance around him before he carefully reached forward and placed a larger piece on the blaze. Then with a sharp exclamation of pain he yanked his hands back from the scorching heat, to wipe them on his shirt front, and in the same instant leaped erect and whirled to one side. A revolver appeared in each of his hands, and before one could think two spurts of flame shot out. The fat man yelled and careened against the wall, clutching his right shoulder. Perry crooked his arm with a startled oath as his gun, holster and all, was torn from his numbed fingers.

"Up!" snapped Nick, and the bewildered Tony obeyed.

Henderson dived across the room, leaped prodigiously and sunk his head in the fat man's stomach. The fat man, who was clawing wildly for his gun with his left hand, grunted and crumpled to the floor in agony. Perry at this instant recovered his wits and rushed forward, snarling, to stagger back, blinded by the impact of a gun-barrel across his eyes.

"Here!" yelled Henderson, squatting before his partner.

Nick lowered one gun, still covering Tony with the other. Henderson grasped the barrel between his wrists and held it against the rawhide thongs.

"Shoot!" he said, and Nick pulled the trigger.

The old man jumped up. His hands and moccasins were scorched, but he was free. He grabbed Tony's gun and covered Perry before the cursing man had cleared his eyes of dizziness and blood.

A minute later the three invaders lay bound hand and foot. Nick and Henderson stood looking down at them.

"Of course," said Nick, "it's easier to draw from your shirt front than your pocket, but I'm pretty near as good as you, ain't I?"

He bent to examine the fat man's shoulder.

"Only a flesh wound," he said to his partner. "I didn't dare to try for his gun in this light. 'T was too far behind him. That was a good one you gave him, all right."

"Yeah?" returned Henderson. "Why, I was all ready an' waitin' for that play. What about the one you give Perry, huh?"

The fat man groaned and eased over on his side.

"Say," he wheezed craftily. "A man that can shoot like you can is wastin' his time out in this —— place. Why don't you two come in with us? There's forty thousand in bills amongst us three. We'll split it five ways—eight thousand apiece. What about it?"

Henderson spat. Nick grinned.

"No," he answered. "Not us, I guess. I seen your face in the papers too many times a couple o' years ago, an' I bet it's there today, too. You're wanted bad back in the States, old boy, an' I know it."

He turned to his partner.

"Jim, they's no use us two tryin' to take this gang out to the Poste. I'll start off now an' bring in the sheriff an' a few others to help. I'll be out there tomorrow night an' back the next. All right?"

"All right, only hustle. We don't want this place to be a pig-pen any longer 'n we can help. Besides, we got to get out on the lines pretty quick."

"Listen." The fat man saw it was no use to try to bribe his captors. "You got us, an' I don't say it wasn't my fault, not takin' Tony's advice an' comin' in peaceable, instead o' stagin' a hold-up." He gave a twisted smile as Tony cursed him heartily. "But you'd never 'a' done it without pullin' that hid gun stunt. I wish you'd tell me before you go just how in —— you did that."

This question was burning in Henderson's mind as well, though he gave no sign, only smiled a superior, tolerant smile as if such a thing was of every-day occurrence.

Nick hesitated, then glanced at his partner and grinned.

"Well, I don't mind tellin' you," he remarked to the prisoners, "seein' as you won't be in a position to try the trick yourselves for a while. It's this way."

He walked to the north window and began pulling out the pegs that held it in place.

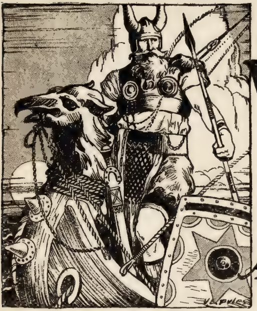
"Didn't you say when you first came in that it was foolish to jump men when they're fightin', because a gun might go off? Well—" he lifted the window out and grinned again as Henderson, in spite of himself, craned his head forward with the rest—"we got a system that cuts out all trouble o' that kind."

He shoved his hand down outside the sill into a little pocket where the snow had been pushed away from the wall and drew out the rifle and some cartridges wrapped in an old oilskin coat. He wiped the gun carefully.

"As I was sayin', whenever we feel a rumpus comin' on, we just chuck our shootin'-irons out this window, an' then we feel free to go to it with no danger. An' also, if a bunch o' human skunks come along an' try to put one over on us, all I got to do is go for some firewood an' crawl round outside the wall, where the heat has melted the snow away, an' select my weapons calm an' leisurely. See? I tell you," he went on as he caught the odd, uncomprehending look in his partner's eyes, "when you get snowed up for the first time in your life, you're liable to begin to see things sorter crooked—crazy like—an' a rip-roarin' scrap every now an' then clears the head of a lot o' trash an' fool ideas. It's a durn good thing."

Henderson stared for an instant. Then his face cleared, and he began to grin broadly. He laid a hand on the young man's shoulder.

"You bet!" he said heartily. "Our friends here'll agree that it helps in more ways than one. An' now, young feller, you better get ready to make tracks for the Poste, soon's I've dished you up a bite to eat."



SWAIN'S VENGEANCE

A Complete Novelette

by Arthur D. Howden Smith

Author of "Beyond the Sunset," "A Son of Strife.," etc.

SWAIN OLAF'S son stood on the battlements of Lambaborg and stared down at the gray North Sea and the single, bluff-bowed craft that was scudding before the Spring gale out of the north. For a moment he thought of ordering his own men into the dragon, *Deathbringer*, that tugged impatiently at taut moorings in the cove beneath the headland, but a second glance assured him of two things—the stranger was neither large enough to be a menace nor rich enough to warrant a sally in such a sea, and in any case, she was edging into shore with the obvious purpose of making the shelter of the cove.

"No Norseman," he muttered to himself. "Scotch, by every line of her. Yet she must come from the Orkneys or beyond. Perhaps she'll carry word from Jarl Paul."

He waited until she was safe under the headland, then descended from the wall and crossed the court to the skalli which occupied its center, ringed by the huts of the sturdy viking-farers who shared the lot of his outlawry. Here he tarried long enough to thrust his head inside the ale-room to bellow an order to the Italian cook he had captured on last Summer's cruise, and passed out the gate. At the foot of the cliff he met a crowd of his men escorting a man and woman, who led a handsome boy just out of babyhood. They were all three richly clad, and the elders moved with an air of assurance, despite the menacing walls of the borg and the savage vikings who surrounded them. But Swain had known many fugitives who were richly clad in the beginnings of their flights, and he frowned.

"Who are you?" he demanded abruptly, as they stopped at his approach. "If you have come here for mercy or for protection you have your trouble for your pains. I am an outlaw, and these men with me are outlaws, too. We have no friends; we give no protection; we show no mercy."

Both the men and the woman laughed.

"I can see that you are Swain Olaf's son," said the man.

"It would be strange if you could not," Swain retorted.

"We know you because you have a rough tongue and a quick tongue, as all men say," answered the woman.

"The winds blow your words away," said Swain impatiently. "You have not told me who you are."

"I am Jarl Maddad of Atjoklar,"* answered the man, "and this is Margaret, my wife. We have been to visit her brother, Jarl Paul, at Orphir, and we stopped on our voyage home to Scotland because we have news of the Orkneys which we thought might interest you."

Swain's face cleared.

"Have you a message from Jarl Paul, lady?" he asked Margaret eagerly.

She shook her head.

"No, Swain, we heard only complaints of you from Jarl Paul."

This time Swain looked from one to the other of them, puzzled. He paid no attention to the child, even when the boy fearlessly came toward him and fingered the scabbard of his sword.

"Come," he said finally. "If you have sailed this far to visit me, at the least you shall have such hospitality as I can offer. We will talk later."

He led the way back up the path to the gate in the wall of the borg which crowned the summit of the headland. At the gate the woman halted to inspect the view.

"A choice hold for an outlaw," she remarked.

"It serves," rejoined Swain.

"How long has it been?" she inquired softly.

"Two years."

"A long time, Swain. They say Asleif, your mother, weeps for you."

Swain cursed under his breath.

"In the skalli we will talk," he said. "But I warn you that you do not commend yourself to me. You are Jarl Paul's sister, to begin with, and you have a trick of annoying me, to cap it off. It is true that the Scots king would make trouble for me if I did away with you, but there are other places than Lambaborg I know of, and no Jarl's anger or king's rage can keep me from visiting punishment where I think it due."

"That is your reputation, Swain," the man interposed hastily. "We have come here to do you a service."

"That is to be seen," said Swain, and turned on his heel.

At the skalli door he dismissed the throng of vikings with a gesture, and ushered his guests into the hall, where the high table was ready spread. And not another word did he speak until they had eaten and their ale-horns were filled. After his own custom, he drank water from a cup, and at the end of the meal the man spoke of this.

"They say you killed Swain Briostreip, Jarl Paul's forecastle man, because he called you a water-drinker, Swain."

"They say lies," returned Swain curtly. "I slew him because he forced a fight upon me. It was his life or mine. Moreover, he was a black sorcerer, as all men know."

---

* Athole.

"My version is Jarl Paul's," answered Jarl Maddad.

"And Witch Frakork's," added the Lady Margaret in her soft voice.

Her husband was a man of middling size, cunning of face, plausible, conciliating. She was largely built and domineering. Swain turned to her, flushing noticeably.

"What is that you say?" he cried.

"It is of interest to you, then?" she inquired, almost mocking.

His eyes met hers, steadily morose—and hers dropped.

"Frakork and Olvir Rosta, her grandson, slew my father and Valthiof, my brother," he replied. "What they say of me can interest no honest man or woman. They are my deadly enemies, aye, and Jarl Paul's."

"Once his, but no longer," she corrected him.

"No longer! Lady, you must be witless. They——"

"Witless I may be, Swain, yet Jarl Paul, my brother, listens to them. Two days since he sent out a summons for a Thing to be held at Orphir, at which they will move for lifting of the outlawry against Frakork and Olvir on account of your father's and brother's deaths, because, they say, you being an outlaw, it is unfair to hold them accountable for deaths in an outlaw's family."

Swain crouched forward in his chair, white-faced and terrible.

"By the old gods!" he swore. "And this is justice! Did not Frakork and Olvir plot with Jarl Paul's cousin, Rognvald, to unseat him? And but for me and my father they would have succeeded! Aye, this is justice! This is Jarl Paul's answer to me because I refused the demand he sent me last Yule that I divide my viking spoils with him."

"He says Lambaborg is as much in his lands of Caithness as in my king's," said Jarl Maddad. "If you, in your outlawry, venture here——"

"This is no man's land," interrupted Swain. "No Jarl of the Orkneys ever made his rule felt here, and as for your Scots king, he bid me remain because I was a protection for the coast against worse than I. Those were his words. But I cared not whether he gave me leave or no. I am my own master, and shall be, so long as Jarl Paul's writ of outlawry runs against me. I have *Deathbringer* and a crew of stout carls and the world to roam."

"You are a man of spirit," applauded the Lady Margaret, softly persuasive.

Swain regarded her with distaste, but his attention was distracted at the moment by a tug at his belt. The son of his guests, having eaten to repletion, had clambered to the floor.

"Swain!" piped the boy. "Swain! Give me your sword to play with."

Swain chuckled in the midst of his sour mood.

"It is overlong and sharp for such as you, manling. What would you do with it?"

"Cut off the head of my uncle."

Swain peered up sharply at the two beside him. Then caught the boy's arm.

"Your uncle? Jarl Paul? Why?"

"Because he will not take me to rule with him."

Swain lifted the child over the table and down upon the floor of the hall.

"Run about, fly-catcher," he ordered. "There are odd holes to discover. Bid the man in the kitchen give you some of that sweet powder we had of the dromon from Mikligard." *

And as the boy pattered off, he turned again to Jarl Maddad and the Lady Margaret.

"So!" he murmured. "There was other reason for your coming here than to give me tidings of my troubles."

The man was disconcerted, but the woman accepted the situation without a qualm.

"Why not?" she said. "And you might have worse allies than we."

"I need no allies," growled Swain.

"That is foolish," she reproved him. "No man is strong enough to fight without allies—especially, if it happens, as in your case, that they are ready to your hand."

"Do you mean that Jarl Maddad will lend me men and money?" demanded Swain.

"No, Swain," replied Maddad, for himself. "That is not necessary. Rognvald is in Norway, still eager to win a Jarldom in the Orkneys, and he will aid you with all he has if you ask him. He waits for a sign that there will be a faction ready to welcome him—and such a faction would spring up under your leadership, for there will be much discontent if Jarl Paul pardons Frakork and Olvir."

---

*Constantinople.

"But how will you benefit by that?" asked Swain shrewdly.

"You could arrange it with Rognvald," suggested Margaret. "There is room for two souls in the Orkneys, and our aid will be worth——"

"You said you would not aid," Swain reminded her.

"No, Swain, I said I would not lend you men and money—at this time," denied Maddad.

"But why should I aid you at all?" pressed Swain.

Maddad shrugged his shoulders, but a sudden light glowed in the woman's eyes.

"For several reasons," she answered. "For one, because it would be just—you have seen our son; you can judge he will grow to become a creditable man; you know that Jarl Paul has no sons of his own; he refuses us only because he dislikes to divide his power. For another reason, it would not be a disadvantage to have a Jarl of the Orkneys and his family under obligation to you."

"Humph," growled Swain, reflecting.

There was a scurry of feet, and the boy raced in from the kitchen, licking his fingers.

"Hi, Swain, that is good to eat, that sweet powder," he called.

Swain chuckled again.

"He is a proper manling," he commented. "What is his name?"

"Harald," said the mother, and her voice throbbed. "He is our youngest. Without the Orkneys, he will have nothing."

"The lot of many others," returned Swain unsympathetically, and rose.

"Will you help us?" inquired Jarl Maddad.

Swain shook his head.

"No, myself."

"Do you mean you will do nothing?" asked the Lady Margaret, sweeping the child into her arms.

"I mean no more than I have said."

"But you can do nothing alone," she urged.

"That is to be seen. Are you so anxious for me to destroy your brother?"

Her face darkened with hatred.

"No brother of mine! He turned me away like a dog."

Swain pulled his golden-red beard.

"I will see how he receives me," he said.

"Will you go to him?" asked Jarl Maddad, surprized. "Man, he has come to hate you! Swain Briostreip, whom you slew, was his favorite. And since you refused to share your viking spoils with him he will not hear your name spoken without raging that you are the evilest of all his people. Men say—" he hesitated, and crossed himself—"Frakork is a witch and has spelled him against you."

"I know her spells," roared Swain with a mighty laugh. "They are not proof against the sword."

"You will require all your men at your back," insisted Maddad.

"I will go to him alone."

"The man is mad!" cried the Lady Margaret.

"You will not stand a chance for your life," exclaimed Jarl Maddad. "An outlaw! Why, any may slay you."

"Let them try!" bellowed Swain.

"Aye, let them, Swain!" shrilled the boy Harald. "We will fight them off, eh?"

Swain's laughter shook the roof-beams.

"You are a better man than he who got you!" he shouted boisterously. "You should go far, boy. Perhaps I shall use you, after all—if Jarl Paul is unreasonable. But first we will try if he has his wits left free of Frakork's spells."

Maddad came closer to him.

"I have no men to spare," he said; "but if gold——"

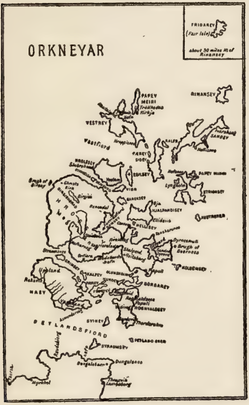
Swain shoved him away against the table.

"Keep your gold! I am fighting for myself, not you. What? Do you think I'll pull your apples from the fire for you? By the old gods! Not I! I am one who uses others; I have no liking for others' using me."

And this was the true way of the coming into Swain Olaf's son's—whom some men began to call Asleif's son, because of his father's death—life of Harald Maddad's son, who was afterward, under Swain's tuition, to become one of the greatest men of the Northern Isles and a fast friend to Swain—when they were not enemies, as all of Swain's friends were at times, for he was a hard man, and bitter, and heavy with his hand. All of which shall be made clear in its proper place.

II

THE next morning the wind moderated, and Swain, having seen his guests off to the south, put himself into a fishing-boat without a man for company and sailed north for the Orkneys. In command of the viking-farers he left Osbiorn Grim's son, who was as close to him as a brother and as loyal as his sword. And it is to be told of Osbiorn and all their company that they stood in ranks upon the beach of the cove under Lambaborg and watched Swain's sail until it was out of sight, for Swain was a leader men cleaved to, either loving him or hating him. For women, except his mother, Asleif, he had little use, holding them to be encumbrances upon a fighting-man and given to backbiting and tale-bearing.


ORKNEYAR
FRIDAREY
(Fair Isle)
about 30 miles N of Rinansey
RINANSEY
PAPEY MEIRI
Trollhedna Kirkja
VESTREY
Vestfiord
Hreppisnes
SANDEY
FÆREY
EGILSEY
PAPEY MINNI
Lyngholm
STRIONSEY
VIGR
GAREKSEY
HJALPANDISEY
Ellidavik
HELLISEY
Brugh of Birsay
Christs Kirk
Birgisa
Renadal
Dyrnesmuli
Brugh of Deerness
Straumsnes
GRIMSEY
Orfiara
Upland
Rakavik
HAEY
KALFEY
BORGAREY
Papuli
ROGNVALDSEY
SVINEY
PETLANDSFIORD
STRAUMSEY
Dungalsnes
Myrkhol
Thraswik
Lambaborg

"I think, Swain, you go to your death," said Osbiorn as he laid his shoulder to the little boat's stern to shove her out into the surf.

"That is to be seen," answered Swain.

"And if it falls out so, we shall be leaderless," continued Osbiorn.

"No, for I name you leader in my place," said Swain. "Bide here three days, and if I am not back upon the fourth day take such action as seems best to you."

"That will be a red burning at Orphir," remarked Osbiorn grimly.

Swain sailed with a quartering wind, steering by the eastward of Rognvaldsey, Borgarey and Deerness of Hrossey, and rounding the Muli of Deerness he ran to the northwest through the broader water between Hjalpandisey and Strionsey and so came to Gairsey, the isle which Jarl Paul had given to his father after the defeat of Rognvald's first attempt to compel Jarl Paul to divide the Orkneys with him. This was at the coming of dusk, and no man saw Swain land in a sheltered cove of the isle's north coast. He walked quickly by remembered paths over moor and fell to the steading where his mother dwelt with his younger brother, Gunni, and knocked upon the skalli door.

Asleif opened it, and at first she did not know her son, for Swain had grown mightily in the two years since she had seen him. His face was ruddied by wind and salt-sting; there was a cut across his cheekbone where a Moslem simitar had slashed, and his red-gold beard covered his broad chest. Also, he was dressed with a richness she was not accustomed to in fabrics from Mikligard* and the wealthy southern countries.

"Ho, mother," he rumbled, "do you deny your son?"

And he swept her in his arms.

"Swain!" she gasped. "You are mad to be here. Jarl Paul holds a Thing at Orphir to grant pardon to Frakork."

"That is why I am here."

"But he will ask also for indefinite outlawry against you. He says you wax rich upon viking spoils, and will not make tribute to your lord."

"All of this I have come to discuss with him."

She pushed her flat palms against his chest so as to be able to look up into his face.

"Now, do I think Frakork has woven a spell upon you!" she exclaimed. "Do you not know, too, that Jarl Paul has served notice that he takes back from us the lands on Straumsey your brother Valthiof held of him and Frakork's in Caithness which he gave to your father?"

A black look settled upon Swain's face, and he led her inside.

"Where is my brother, Gunni, that he tolerates this?" he demanded.

"Gunni has done what he may," replied Asleif. "He is now at Orphir to attend the

---

* Constantinople.

Thing and protest against the Jarl's decision."

"Gunni is overyoung to face the Jarl," said Swain. "It is a good thing that I am here. Jarl Paul will hear truth for once."

"And his house-carls will slay you!"

"Then others will be slain, but I think the Orkney folk will see justice done—and even an outlaw should be allowed to speak when the Jarl would pardon his father's slayers."

Asleif tossed up her hands in sign of her helplessness.

"If you will go to your death, you will. I have said what I may. Now, do you tell me what I may do for you?"

She did not weep because she was of those women who face danger dry-eyed. Swain patted her shoulder approvingly, and pulled her down beside him upon the high seat of the hall.

"When is the Thing?"

"On the morrow."

"That is good! I shall not have to remain hidden. Tell me, mother, how do the people regard the Jarl's new favor for Frakork?"

"They like it not, Swain; but they say they have had an easy rule under Jarl Paul, and if he cares to traffic with a witch, that is between him and Bishop William."

"Humph," rasped Swain, deep in his throat. "Then we have Bishop William on our side."

"But he will not go far, Swain. Remember, he was glad that you killed Swain Briostreip, who was as much of a sorcerer as Frakork is a witch, yet he could not save you from outlawry."

"I remember. Is Jarl Paul still fearful of Rognvald in Norway?"

Aslief regarded him with a hint of surprize.

"Yes, he has had beacons built on all the islands north to Fridarey, so that the people may signal the coming of any strange longships."

Swain considered this for some moments, whilst the hearth-fire sputtered.

"That is to be taken into account," he muttered.

And rousing himself, he continued:

"But I am weary, mother. Give me food, and let me sleep. I have much to do on the morrow."

"You will not go to Orphir?" she pressed. "At the least, take some of our people with you."

"So that they may be hewn down by Jarl Paul's house-carls? Not I! See you, mother, I might have come in *Deathbringer*, with a hundred viking-farers at my back; but that would have meant fighting, and perhaps, the odds against me. No, this is work for one man to do with his wits. I will offer Olvir Rosta a free cut at my neck if I can not outwit Jarl Paul, who is grown grasping and sly with the years."

The flames on the hearth leaped higher and illuminated his stalwart figure and bold face. A gleam of mingled love and admiration dawned in Asleif's eyes, and flowered to hope, to confidence.

"It is something to have borne such a son," she cried. "I will pray tonight to the old gods and the White Christ. It is hard sometimes to know which works swiftest."

Swain laughed carelessly.

"The gods are well enough for women," he said. "But a man puts his trust in his sword."

III

LONG before dawn Swain was in his boat again, and crossed the narrow waters of the Aurrida Firth to Hrossey. There he beached his craft, and set off on foot across the neck of the island to Orphir, going by way of the fells because he saw early folk astir upon the footpath. The sun was riding high when he came out upon the hillside over Orphir and looked down upon the close-packed ranks of the Thing in the open space before the Jarl's steading.

He wrapped his cloak around him, the better to conceal the mail he wore and his splendid garments, and strode down the hillside without more ado, forcing his way between the outer circles of commonfolk who surrounded the boendr and odalmen, who, in turn, stood before the Jarl and the bishop and his clerks.

Swain's keen gaze identified his enemies at the Jarl's left hand, Frakork, tall and stately in her clinging robes, trimmed with fur, her gray hair decently dressed, her full, unlined face defying the pressure of the age she had reached, her cold, green eyes shifting from man to man, as she mustered friend and foe in the secret chamber of her mind; Olvir Rosta, of an equal age with himself, squat in build, immensely broad of shoulder and long of arm, with a coal-black beard masking his swart and lowering face.

Opposite them, consternation and anger struggling for control in his frank countenance, was Swain's younger brother, Gunni. And on the Jarl's right stood Bishop William, mitered and robed, crozier in hand, staring straight in front of him as if he had no desire to concern himself in the proceedings.

Jarl Paul was speaking as Swain reached the edge of the inner circle, and his words carried clearly in the still air, for there was not so much as the creak of a sword-belt to interrupt him.

"This is a simple matter to be judged, and if I have called together the boendr to hear my decision it is only that men may not say afterward that I did it secretly. Several years since when Olaf of Dungelsbae was alive I augmented his lands considerably, seeing that he had three sons to aid him in managing them. But now he and one of his sons are dead, and another son is outlawed. It is bad for all that so much land should be left in the hands of a woman and one youth, and therefore I have decided to take back Straumsey that Valthiof Olaf's son held and the lands in Caithness that were once Frakork Maddan's daughter's, and which I gave to Olaf."

Gunni leaped forward, his body trembling with rage.

"Do you call this justice, Lord Jarl?" he challenged.

Swain smiled in his beard.

"There is good stuff in this boy, it seems," he murmured to himself.

Jarl Paul smiled tolerantly. He was a man of middle height, mild in his manner and temperate in his habits, but much given to falling under the influence of whoever happened to have his ear last, vain of his dignity and a great stickler for what he thought was due him.

"Certainly, it is justice, Gunni," he said. "It is for the Jarl to think of the well-being of all."

"Have my mother and I refused you rent or service for anything we held?"

"No, but you have not cultivated or employed all of your lands," returned the Jarl, still good-humored.

"And for that the reason is that my brother Swain is kept outlawed, with nigh an hundred strong fellows, for a deed he did two years and more gone, and for which he has offered twice to pay manbote and scathe," Gunni shouted.

Jarl Paul frowned.

"The less you say about Swain, the better you will please me," he warned. "He is an outlaw who shows no respect for his lord."

Gunni was incensed past reason.

"You would not say so, if Frakork had not bewitched you," he cried. "The truth is, you intend to take back these lands from us, and give them to her and Olvir Rosta, whom you outlawed for rebellion against yourself, as well as for the slaying of my father and Valthiof, my brother."

There was a lurching of shoulders throughout the ranks of the Thing at such straight talk, and Swain hovered upon the verge of action. Jarl Paul's frown became a scowl.

"You are insolent, Gunni," he said. "Beware lest I bid my house-carls whip you hence. It is no concern of yours what I do with the land."

Several men near Swain muttered resentfully at this, for the boendr were always jealous of the Jarl's land-rights; and Swain judged the time had come for his intercession. He pushed between the two in front of him, and walked into the midst of the open space, one hand on his sword. A gasp came from the huddled ranks. Frakork's green eyes blazed with a cold flame, and Olvir took one pace forward before his grandmother's hand checked him. Jarl Paul gaped with fallen jaw. As for the bishop, he stole one swift glance at the newcomer, then resumed his attitude of stolid indifference.

"There has been talk here of Swain Olaf's son," remarked Swain coolly. "Also, it came to my ears recently at Lambaborg that Jarl Paul would deal with my family's lands and the slayers of my father and brother at this Thing, and since I have found it impossible to treat with him concerning my outlawry from a distance, I decided to come myself to Orphir, and try to compose our differences."

"Seize him, house-carls," stammered the Jarl, and again Olvir Rosta started forward.

But a cry rose from the boendr and odalmen, and even from the common men outside the circle, a cry which was taken up and repeated, although not every one joined in it.

"Not so, Lord Jarl!" "Does he come in peace?" "Speak him, does he come in peace, lord!" And more to the same purpose.

The bishop grasped more firmly the staff of his crozier as if about to arise, but sat back in his chair after a stealthy survey of the Jarl's face.

It was noticeable that the group of house-carls at the Jarl's back had not leaped to obey his command. Swain smiled a grim smile; his hand left his sword-hilt.

"Perhaps my coming was unexpected," he observed bluntly. "I ask pardon of all for that, but the fact is I have traveled day and night, in order to reach here. Greetings, Lord Jarl! Your blessing, Father Bishop! Gunni, I am not ashamed to own you brother."

Gunni grinned uncertainly.

"I am no viking-farer, Swain, but what I can do I will to see you safe," he replied.

"I shall go safe," answered Swain. "And I come in peace."

Jarl Paul's face showed inflamed with rage through the hair of his beard.

"You are an outlaw," he rasped. "You have no place on the Thingstead."

"Why, that is true," admitted Swain, "but I see that I am not the only outlaw peaceably admitted."

And he nodded toward Frakork and Olvir Rosta. A murmur of assent greeted his words, for many of the boendr were not friendly to these two, and the people ever favored a brave man who was not afraid to outface the Jarl.

"Nevertheless, there is a difference," asserted the Jarl now, ordering his words with difficulty. "Frakork has offered to compound her misdeeds."

"With me?" questioned Swain.

"With you and also with Jarl Paul," answered Frakork, speaking for the first time.

Her voice had a peculiar chilling intonation which made people shudder. Swain only laughed aloud.

"As both you and Frakork know, Lord Jarl," he said, "neither I nor my mother nor my brother here will accept manbote from Frakork and Olvir. There are two killings between us, and they will remain between us until we have two killings to order against them."

Jarl Paul started to speak, but Swain raised his voice and continued:

"Moreover, Lord Jarl, I marvel that you could compound with Frakork and Olvir for their offenses against you. Did not Frakork weave a poisoned shirt for you, which, by mistake, slew your brother, Harald? Did not she and Olvir plot with Rognvald in Norway to drive you from the islands? Did they not fight you off the Muli in a battle I won for you?"

"That last is an old story," sneered the Jarl. "Some men say it was not you, but Swain Briostreip who cast the stone which knocked Olvir overboard."

"Ask Olvir," replied Swain.

All eyes turned toward Frakork's grandson, and he ground his teeth in a grimace of venomous rage.

"One Swain is dead," he mouthed thickly. "The other soon will be."

These words recalled Jarl Paul to the present.

"Yes," he roared, "Swain Olaf's son slew Swain Briostreip, the best friend I owned, for no more than an ill word and after I had expressly bidden him not to accept a quarrel. For that is he outlaw and shall——"

"— stay outlaw until he halves his viking spoils with you," finished Swain smoothly. "Which will be never, Lord Jarl."

He turned to the ring of boendr and odalmen.

"It is right that you should know why I have remained an outlaw, although I am a man of wealth and well able to pay manbote for an ordinary follower like Swain Briostreip," he said. "Twice I have asked the Jarl to end my outlawry, seeing that if I disobeyed his commands in fighting with Swain Briostreip it was because only by so doing could I save my own life; and each time he has answered me with a demand that I pay him manbote for Swain's death, and also one-half of the spoil of my cruises as tribute to my natural lord and overman. I have refused twice. I killed Swain in a quarrel which was not of my making; and I see no reason why I should share with the Jarl treasures I won without any help from him."

"The dragon you rove in I gave you," complained the Jarl, "and your men are my people. Your brother has said that he can not work his lands because you have taken so many away."

"End my outlawry, and they will return for the Spring planting," rejoined Swain.

Another murmur of assent echoed Swain's words. The Jarl mumbled in his beard.

"And besides what I have already said," Swain went on, "I hear now that you are planning to insult my family by restoring your protection to Frakork and Olvir, and to heap insult upon that by taking from us lands to give to them, lands which you took from Frakork aforetime as punishment for her misdeeds and bestowed upon my father as reward for his loyalty. It is ridiculous, Lord Jarl. The scalds will be singing that the ravens plucked forth your wits."

Jarl Paul bounded from his chair, but Frakork took the words from his mouth.

"It is easily to be seen from Swain's own words why Jarl Paul makes it difficult for him to return to his rights," she said. "As also, why our Lord Jarl desires to restore his protection to me and to Olvir, my grandson. Swain is a hard man, as is widely known, and jealous of others; he shows no respect for the Jarl. On the other hand, Olvir and I have as much wealth and as many friends as Swain, but we are glad to live humbly at the Jarl's orders. Swain is a good enemy and a bad friend; we are anxious only to be at peace with our neighbors."

"Until they cross you," jeered Swain.

"We have made our mistakes in the past," admitted Frakork with dignity. "But here we are ready to compose all of them, offering manbote, scathe or fine to any and all who can prove we have offended against them."

"By buying the Jarl's favor," mocked Swain. "That is what you mean. Behold, all who are of the Thing, Jarl Paul has accepted blood-money from a witch!"

The Jarl's sword ripped from its sheath.

"Hew him down, house-carls!" he called this time.

The house-carls advanced, reluctantly enough; but Olvir Rosta shook free of his grandmother and sprang into the midst of the ring with bared blade. A sudden hush gripped the assembly. All looked to see Swain draw, but instead he folded his arms across his breast, with a sarcastic smile.

"I came in peace," he said simply.

Olvir danced forward, mouthing curses. Jarl Paul egged him on.

"Hew him down!" shrieked the Jarl. "A golden arm-ring—two arm-rings—to the man who slays him!"

Frakork's eyes were wickedly alight in her impassive face, but a low, voiceless rumble came from the spectators. The house-carls sensed it, and stopped in their tracks. Not so Olvir, who came nearer to Swain, stepping carefully, fearful of a trick. Gunni called out to his brother.

"Draw sword, Swain! I will keep your back."

Swain only smiled, and Olvir raised his blade to strike. Gunni rushed at him, waving his own sword, and the ring swirled inward to disintegrate as Bishop William gathered his robes around him and sped between the enemies, brandishing his crozier like a spear.

"Back!" thundered the bishop in a voice that had bested the storm in his early viking days.

Olvir, red-eyed, intent upon slaying, placed a hand on the sacred vestments and would have shoved him aside; but Bishop William drove the butt of the crozier into his stomach.

"Back, I said!" he thundered again. "God's curse on the man who disobeys."

Mad with rage, Olvir gave ground, and in the confusion others came between them and herded him away. But none could hold off Jarl Paul, who strode, with bristling beard, into the center of the disturbance.

"Outside the church, I rule in these islands, bishop," he shouted. "I take it ill that you interfered in the execution of an order."

Bishop William refused to retreat.

"I am an old man, Lord Jarl," he answered, "and it is not my wont to interfere; but in this case I have saved you from losing a half of your people."

"You have saved the life of one outlaw," returned the Jarl angrily, and he added, "for a little while."

Bishop William shook his head.

"If Swain is slain there will be such fighting as was never seen at an Orkney Thing."

Several men, safe on the farther edge of the crowd, shouted assent to this.

"Swain shall not die alone!"

"Swain came in peace; let him go in peace."

"Slay him who drew the sword, not him who kept it sheathed."

"I think the Bishop is right, Lord Jarl," said Swain curtly. "Be sure I never intend to die alone."

"Is that a threat?" growled the Jarl.

"No, a promise."

"And here is one I make to you," roared the Jarl. "If I catch you again in my islands you shall die by torture."

Swain smiled.

"Make the most of your threats, Lord Jarl. I think you will not be jarl for very long to foster them."

Once more Bishop William came between them.

"Peace, peace," he urged. "Your friends will be at each other's throats. Let us compose this quietly."

"The one way to compose this is to compass Swain's death," answered the Jarl. "He is a trouble-maker, and I am finished with him."

"We shall see about that," said Swain. "Do you still intend to inlaw Frakork and Olvir and give them the lands of my family?"

"I will give them all your family's lands, if I see fit," snarled Jarl Paul. "Be careful of your conduct, Gunni Olaf's son. You are not outlawed yet, but outlawed you may be."

"I am content if I am in Swain's company," retorted young Gunni.

"Then see that you go with him!"

"No, no," exclaimed the bishop. "Will you outlaw half the islands, Lord Jarl? I tell you all are not with you in this."

"They had better not speak, in that case," returned the Jarl with undiminished passion, "for I am resolved upon having my will."

And with this he left them, and the bishop and his party edged the two brothers out of the field and across the island to Aurridaside where Swain's boat lay; but before Swain set sail the bishop had speech with him in private.

"Did you accomplish what you set out to do, Swain?" he asked.

"I did not thwart Frakork, if that is what you mean," answered Swain.

"No, that is not what I mean," said Bishop William, "because that was not what you had in mind."

"What did I have in mind?" demanded Swain.

The bishop reflected as they stood on the beach. He was leaning on his crozier.

"You can tell the man you will see in Bjorgvin," * he replied at last, "that there will be much dissatisfaction for him to work on—but it is due to Swain Olaf's son and not to himself."

"Ah," said Swain, "I see that you understand there are several ways to gain an object, Lord Bishop."

Then he kissed the bishop's ring, and went to say good-by to his brother.

"I know that you are wiser than I, Swain," Gunni greeted him, "but why did you not slay Olvir when the chance came?"

"Because by so doing I should very likely have been slain myself."

"Ah! Yet even so, you might have killed Frakork and the Jarl, as well, and what more could a man ask?"

"Much more, Gunni, as you will see."

"When? How?" inquired Gunni eagerly. "Take me with you, Swain."

"No, for I need you here. Take care of our mother. Keep out of the way of Jarl Paul and Frakork's people, and store up all you hear. Some dark night I will come again."

IV

DEATHBRINGER cautiously threaded a path through the crowded haven of Bjorgvin. Iceland traders, with high-built sides to withstand the billows of the North Atlantic; low-waisted Danishmen; broad-beamed English transports; and dozens of lean-flanked Norse dragons and longships, half-pirates, half-merchantmen as occasion served—they lay in motley confusion off the straggling town. Hairy fellows, stripped to the waist in the bright northern sunshine, leaned over bulwarks and shouted to know whence came the strange dragon and whom she served; but Swain steered silently past all inquirers until he reached the position he sought. Then he plumped overboard the anchor-stone; bade his men refuse all opportunities for quarreling; and had the small-boat dropped into the water. Ten minutes later he stood on the beach, and ascertained from the first man he encountered that Rognvald Kol's son lived at Unna's tavern over against St. Olaf's church.

The tavern was a house like any other, with an unusually large drinking-hall and sleeping-rooms opening off the hall and above the floored rafters. The hall was occupied by long tables, lined with benches, and the spaces between them were barely wide enough for the cup-boys and serving-men to pass.

Unna, a stout, sleepy-eyed woman, sat in a corner by the door to ale-room and kitchens. Her tavern was notable—as Swain perceived at the first glance—for the rank of its patrons. They were all lendermen* and their followers, and the men who lounged at the tables were distinguished by the quality of their dress and the fineness of their mail. Those at the door regarded Swain askance when he entered, not because of his costume, for it was as rich as theirs, but because he was a stranger, and in Bjorgvin, or for that matter, any place in Norway, the stranger was regarded with suspicion.

---

* Bergen.

Swain never heeded the manner of his reception, but spoke directly, according to his custom, to the man nearest him.

"I am seeking Rognvald Kol's son," he said. "Can you tell me who he is?"

"Perhaps you mean *Jarl* Rognvald Kol's son," answered the man with a sneer.

"Since when is he a jarl?" returned Swain.

"Since the king made him one," replied the man. "And if you value your life, I advise you to treat him with proper respect."

"Swain's blue eyes bored so fiercely into the Norseman's that the latter looked away.

"I am used to being treated with respect, myself," growled Swain. "You have not yet answered my question."

The man pointed to a table close by.

"There is Jarl Rognvald."

Swain followed the pointing finger, and saw a large, fair man, with a pleasant, open face, who was attended by others in gilded helms. They were drinking ale and talking amongst themselves. Swain walked straight to Jarl Rognvald's side.

"I hear the king has made you a jarl, Rognvald Kol's son," he said. Rognvald and the others at the table looked up in some astonishment.

"That is true," replied Rognvald.

"And of what are you jarl?" asked Swain.

Rognvald's eyes narrowed and his fingers clenched together.

"Who are you who speak to me with such disrespect?" he demanded.

Swain laughed.

"I am he who will show you how to win your jarldom," he answered. "Men call me Swain Olaf's son. I am Orkney-born."

Now, Rognvald laughed, too, as did several of the others at the table.

"I have heard of you," he said. "You are he who was outlawed by Jarl Paul for the slaying of Swain Briostreip."

"That is true," admitted Swain.

"You have a viking hold at Lambaborg in the south of Caithness, men say," pursued Jarl Rognvald.

"That also is true."

"And you say you have come here to aid me?"

"That must depend upon yourself," rejoined Swain. "I can not aid any man who is witless, and I do not yet know you sufficiently well to decide whether you are sensible enough to serve my purpose."

The other men at the table opened their eyes very wide at this plain speaking, and Jarl Rognvald bit his lip.

"You have a harsh tongue, Swain," he commented.

"I have a harsh tongue and a quick tongue," agreed Swain. "I say what I think and fulfill what I promise. Men take me as I am or not at all. I said what I did because I thought you did not show good sense in the conduct of your last attempt upon the Orkneys."

Jarl Rognvald studied him for as long as a man requires to buckle a mail-coat.

"I can not say you are wrong there, Swain," he admitted at last.

Swain plucked by the shoulder the man who sat opposite the Jarl.

"Move over," he said.

The man dumbly obeyed, and Swain took his place.

"I have learned what I required to know," he went on. "A man who will admit that he has been foolish can always learn. Therefore, I will help you, Lord Jarl."

This time Jarl Rognvald laughed.

"It is to be remarked," he pointed out, "that I have not requested your aid."

"Yet will you be glad to have it," replied Swain. "I do not doubt that you and friends of yours have been debating the chances of a second expedition against Jarl Paul since the ice melted in the fiords, and you have not yet seen your way to the attempt."

"Nevertheless, I am going," answered Jarl Rognvald swiftly. "And I am resolved that this time I shall succeed or find a hough* in the Orkneys."

"That is good talk," said Swain composedly; "but it does not win battles. Will you take my aid?"

"What have you to offer?"

"My dragon, ***Deathbringer***, and a hundred viking-farers."

---

* Noblemen.

* Burial mound.

Jarl Rognvald's face fell.

"That is well enough, Swain; but I am at no loss for men. I can put six dragons, besides other ships, in the water in a week. What I need is a trick to take Paul by surprize and a way to win a moiety of his people to me."

"The one is almost accomplished and the other will be, if you accept my terms," promised Swain.

"And what are your terms?" asked the Jarl.

"That I and my men be inlawed, that my lands which Jarl Paul has taken be restored to me, and finally, that I have your permission and aid whenever I seek it to revenge myself upon Frakork Maddan's daughter and her grandson, Olvir Rosta, who slew my father and my brother Valthiof."

"Those are easy terms, Swain," said Jarl Rognvald. "Do I understand that you ask for no reward in money or lands?"

"No, for I have sufficient money and can always gain more when I wish it."

"How?" inquired the Jarl curiously.

"With my two hands," returned Swain.

Jarl Rognvald pondered. He was, as all men who knew him declared, no fool, albeit impulsive and hot-headed and inclined for any desperate venture which was commended to him. When Swain came to him he was restless under the Spring viking-fever which creeps into all men's blood, and he was discontented from having labored fruitlessly for more than two years to live down the ridicule which had been aimed at him for the complete failure of his first endeavor to seize the Jarldom of the Orkneys.

"My disposition is to accept your offer," he answered at length. "It is certain that I bear some disgrace for not being able in my first expedition to the Orkneys even to force Jarl Paul to a battle with me, and I can not rest easy until I wipe this out. Moreover, as you know, my claim to the Jarldom is at least as good as Paul's, seeing that my mother, Gunnhild, was daughter to Jarl Erlend, brother of the first Jarl Paul, who was my cousin's grandfather. At the least, I should have one-half the islands, and King Harald has said as much and made me a Jarl and given me a dragon to assist me in upholding my claim."

"All of which is true, as words go," commented Swain impatiently. "But words will not overset Jarl Paul."

Jarl Rognvald smiled.

"If you had a nickname, Swain, it should be Roughtongue. Yet I think you mean it honestly, so I shall not take offense. I will accept your aid upon the terms you name. Here is my hand on the bargain. Now, do you tell me what you propose to do in addition to lending me your dragon and men."

So Swain detailed the results of his attendance at Jarl Paul's Thing at Orphir a few weeks past, as well as the bishop's comment in parting with him on Aurridaside.

"That," he said, "is the edge of the ax we will drive between Jarl Paul and his people."

"It is a good edge upon a good ax," remarked Jarl Rognvald; "but I do not see that you can do more than leave time to drive it home."

"I see how it can be done otherwise," retorted Swain. "Jarl Paul has had beacons prepared upon all the islands north to Fridarey, with watchmen appointed to tend them, so that he may have instant warning of longships coming from the Hjaltlands* or Norway."

Jarl Rognvald shook his head.

"This is unfortunate. I had not heard of it. It destroys our chance of surprizing Jarl Paul."

"Not so," replied Swain. "It insures it—as, also, the division of his people."

And then he explained his plan, and the Jarl slapped his hand upon the table.

"Now do I know how you came by such a reputation as a viking-farer in two short years, Swain! It is not many chiefs who combine wit with weapon-skill; but you plan like a clerk or a scald. It is well! Your plan could not be bettered. We will agree to sail for the Hjaltlands this day week, and my friends and I will call up our men from the farms and boun† our vessels. Do you bide here with me, for I see that I shall frequently wish to ask your advice."

V

JARL ROGNVALD and Swain came to the Hjaltlands in the beginning of Summer, with six longships, three transports and five open barges. The Hjaltlanders welcomed them because in these islands any one who was an enemy of Jarl Paul of the Orkneys was regarded as a friend, and moreover, Jarl Rognvald had been very generous with the island people during his previous stay amongst them. But it was not the purpose of Jarl Rognvald and Swain to linger in the Hjaltlands any longer than was necessary to execute the schemes Swain had devised, and they set about this at once.

---

* Shetlands.

† Make ready, equip, load, victual, etc.

Their first move was to muster all the transports and barges, eight of them, with sufficient crews, and with these Swain sailed to the southward the next morning. When they sighted the mass of Fridarey low on the horizon, at Swain's order, they lowered their sails until the yards were a third of the way up the masts, and they continued so until they were within range of the eyes of the watchers on the island. It was a clear, cool day with very little haze. And when Swain was certain that their masts must have become visible to the folk on Fridarey he ordered the sails to be gradually hoisted, so that the effect upon the watchers was of ships becoming more distinct as they approached nearer to the island. But he prevented the increased sail area from urging the vessels forward by having the crews row backward against the wind, a trick which had the effect of keeping them practically stationary.

Presently, a puff of smoke rose from the island, and Swain chuckled grimly as he watched the pillar mount higher and higher. He knew that already the beacon-tenders in Rinansey must have seen it, and their signal would be carrying the false intelligence southward to Sandey and on down through the Orkneys to far off Straumsey in the Pentland Firth.

"There goes Jarl Paul's fortune," he said. "Lower sails and pull north, men."

But he, himself, went into a small sailboat that had been towed by one of the transports, and running to the southeast, fetched a wide circle around Fridarey, and so continued, until long past the settling of night, he passed westward between Austreker and Strionsey and navigated the treacherous inner waters to his own isle of Gairsey. Here he landed before dawn, and aroused his mother and Gunni.

"I have no time for love-talk," he said sternly when they were all three safe in Asleif's bower. "I am come on serious business. What happened today, Gunni, when the Jarl's people mustered?"

"How did you know?" cried Gunni blankly.

But Asleif smiled shrewdly.

"So it was you, Swain!" she exclaimed.

"What do you mean by that, mother?" demanded Gunni. "What was Swain?"

"Peace, boy, peace," she bade him, still smiling. "Let Swain tell you himself."

"I see not what he can tell," answered Gunni, nettled. "He can scarcely know of the fighting that fell out at Hrossey only a few hours back."

"I may not know of it," returned Swain, "but I caused it."

"Oh, those were your ships, then, they signaled from Fridarey? Why did you turn back? You might have been master of the Orkneys by now."

"That will come," said Swain. "I turned back for a purpose. Now, do you tell me what happened afterward."

"Why, the boendr and their folk all mustered at Kirkiuvag* in Hrossey according to the Jarl's plan, when the smokes were seen; but nothing happened all day, and at last when the watchmen from Fridarey and Rinansey arrived there was much bitter talk, especially after the Fridarey folk admitted that the strange vessels had sailed away. It ended in blows and some slaughter, and we all separated and went home, muttering against Jarl Paul and his plans. I'll warrant you, he'll never secure such another general attendance at a muster, Swain, yet if you had rowed in about sunset when the fighting was on one-half the men would have taken your side."

"And so they will when the right time comes," answered Swain. "This has worked out as I had foreseen. But what of Bishop William?"

"He is on ill terms with Jarl Paul, and the Jarl is sore set against him," replied Asleif. "As you know, Swain, he is my cousin on the side of my mother, and he comes in frequently for a horn of ale when he passes to and from Egilsey. He speaks of you often, and has said it is sad to think that after you slew Swain Briostreip, the worst sorcerer in the islands, and so removed the Jarl from an evil influence, the Jarl should take up anew with a foul witch like Frakork, again to your despite."

"I shall attend to Frakork and Olvir

---

*Now Kirkwall.

Rosta, mother," said Swain. "Are they with Jarl Paul?"

"No, they have gone to plant the lands he restored to them at Morkaorsbakki in Caithness, the same which he took back from us."

"When I have settled matters between Jarl Rognvald and Jarl Paul I will see to their broiling," growled Swain. "They will come to small profit by their cozening of this witless Jarl, who has grown niddering with his years. But I have work for both of you to do, and I must depart before men see me.

"This day week, Gunni, I would have you sail to Fridarey, putting in there as if you had been fishing and were overtaken by night. After dark make excuse so that you can go to the new beacon they will have built, and soak it with water so that it will not burn."

Gunni's eyes blazed with excitement.

"You can trust me, Swain. I'll not fail you! And you will be coming then with Jarl Rognvald?"

"I shall be coming. If not that day, the next. So if it storms you must stay on Fridarey by one pretext or another and see to it that the beacon is kept wet. I think we will come by the westward and through Straumsness to Orphir. We will hunt the badger out of his hole. This brings me to your part, mother. I must have Bishop William with us. Can we rely upon him?"

She shook her head.

"No man can rely upon Bishop William, Swain. He fights for his own hand. For the present, he is against Jarl Paul because he thinks the Jarl does not pay enough attention to religion; but if Jarl Paul made it worth his while I doubt not he would veer around again."

"Then it comes to this," said Swain. "To be sure of the bishop, we must promise him what he desires."

"Yes."

"What is that?"

Asleif thought for a long time.

"The east is whitening," Swain reminded her.

"I know it, my son, but this is a hard question. I think, though, that he feels most the humiliation of being a bishop without a great church such as are built in the southern countries."

Swain's face lightened.

"Ho, that is an easy wish to gratify," he remarked. "Do you go to Egilsey in the morning, mother, and tell him that Jarl Rognvald sends him word by me that when Rognvald is Jarl he will build him the greatest minster in all the northern countries."

"But what will Rognvald say?" objected Asleif.

"He will say what I bid him to," replied Swain casually. "And now I must be off."

VI

JARL ROGNVALD was so delighted with the success of Swain's schemes that he agreed as readily as Swain had supposed he would to take upon himself to vow a cathedral for the Orkneys; and in the ensuing week they overhauled their shipping and made ready the weapons of the crews. The eighth day from Swain's leaving Gairsey was clear and cloudless, with an east wind such as is easiest for navigating the west coast of the Orkneys, and the fleet set forth upon the venture with shield-hung sides and bristling spears on forecastle and poop.

They passed Fridarey within easy sight, and all eyes watched for the tell-tale smoke of the beacon; but Gunni evidently had performed the task assigned to him, and in those sparsely-wooded regions it was impossible to gather a considerable heap of firewood on short notice. They skirted the coast of Hrossey, the principal island of the group, turned southeast by Straumsness and made Orphir in late afternoon. Men scurried from the farms and the group of buildings in Jarl Paul's steading. Faint shouts were wafted across the water. Messengers ran in every direction. But when Jarl Rognvald's men climbed ashore Jarl Paul's people retired sullenly without casting a spear. They were taken by surprize, and hopelessly outnumbered. Rognvald and his chiefs sat to their evening meal in the great hall of Jarl Paul's skalli, eating the food that had been prepared for him and drinking his mead and ale.

In the morning Swain and his men, who were familiar with the country, scouted the vicinity and held speech with certain of the boendr, who told him that Jarl Paul had fled across Aurrida Firth to the steading of Sigurd of Westness. Also, Gunni and Asleif came in, and Asleif carried word that Bishop William would be glad to consult with Jarl Rognvald, with a view to composing the dispute between him and Jarl Paul; and at Swain's suggestion, Gunni was dispatched to Egilsey, where the bishop dwelt with a community of holy men, for lack of a better residence, bidding him visit Jarl Rognvald at Orphir. In the meantime, the life of the islands went on very quietly, and the boendr and odalmen and the commonfolk who served them were vastly surprized at the ease with which Jarl Rognvald had come amongst them and wrested from Jarl Paul, without the fighting of a battle or the slaying of a man, a good half of his dominions.

"He must be a very wise man," men said one to another.

And those who were wise, themselves, said—

"Ah, but he has Swain Olaf's son continually at his ear."

Jarl Paul was bewildered by the misfortunes which had visited him, and he could not understand how they had come about. When his messengers carried the fire-arrow through the islands, calling upon his vassels for service, most of them flatly refused attendance, and those who did appear before him brought few men and were reluctant to take any positive action.

"The last time you called upon us the upshot was that we fought among ourselves," one of the richest of the boendr sent him word in declining to go to Westness, either himself or his sons or any of their men. So Jarl Paul sat-out the days in the skalli of Sigurd of Westness, his best friend, and drank horn after horn of ale until he was fuddled in his wits.

It was when he was in such a condition that the idea occurred to him of sending for Frakork and Olvir Rosta.

"They will help me," he babbled. "I made a great mistake ever to allow them to leave my side. I will have Frakork make witchcraft against Rognvald and Swain, and Olvir shall slay them."

But on the third day his messenger returned from Caithness with word that Frakork was much concerned for his plight, yet dared not commit her people to the hazards of the journey to Westness, when Rognvald's fleet lay betwixt them. That night Jarl Paul drank until he fell from the high table, and his house-carls carried him off to his couch.

It was on this day, too, that Bishop William came to Orphir in state, with his chaplains and chancellors and attendants, and sat privately with Jarl Rognvald and Swain in the skalli. He was very smooth in his talk—so that many men afterwards gave him the nickname of *Slettmali*, which is to say Smoothtalker—and lamented much over the unhappy strife which was likely to devastate the islands, and he continued in this strain so long that Swain lost his temper.

"Here are many good words, but no indication of deeds," he fumed. "We are come to this issue, Father Bishop—there shall be a battle between Jarl Rognvald and Jarl Paul, in which many people must die, or else their differences shall be composed—and there is none save you who can compose them."

"Ah," said Bishop William gently, and he contemplated the joined tips of his fingers. "None but me, as you say, Swain! Yes, none but me!"

"And for that," continued Swain ruthlesssly, "you must have a price—like all men."

The bishop was shocked.

"A price, Swain! This is more of your rough talk. What price could you or Jarl Rognvald pay to me, a bishop?"

Swain cast a sly look at Jarl Rognvald, and the Jarl cleared his throat.

"There is a great want in these islands," he began uncertainly.

"Ah, yes," sighed Bishop William, "many wants, my son!"

"There is one great want, so men have told me," Jarl Rognvald plowed resolutely on. "So rich a land should show decent respect for religion, a quality, I understand, in which Jarl Paul is lacking."

"He is overfond of sorcerers and magicians," commented the bishop sourly. "But we may yet convert him."

"I doubt it," answered Swain bluntly. "And in any case, he loves his money too much to build you a cathedral."

The bishop sat up very straight.

"A cathedral!" he repeated. "Ah, yes! A minster worthy to hold the relics, let us say, of our marvelous St. Magnus, that thrice holy and miracle-working Jarl, whose blood, I daresay, still flows in your veins, Jarl Rognvald."

"That was in my mind," Jarl Rognvald assured him hastily. "I am under a deep obligation to Heaven, Father Bishop.

Would you think it presumptuous in me if I vowed that the first act of my new Jarldom should be to erect a fitting shrine for the bones of the holy Magnus?"

"An excellent plan, and one deserving of Divine blessing," applauded Bishop William.

"And now," grumbled Swain, "what terms can you wring from that drunken sot at Westness?"

"I am sure that Jarl Paul—with a little urging from his friends—will consent to divide the islands with Jarl Rognvald," answered the bishop.

"That is a beginning, at any rate," said Swain. "How say you, Lord Jarl?"

"It would be an honorable adjustment," agreed the Jarl.

And this was the way in which Swain Olaf's son secured for Jarl Rognvald a half of the Orkneys, without the fighting of a battle or the slaying of a man—as, likewise, how the Cathedral of St. Magnus, which is still standing in Kirkiuvag, came to be built.

VII

SO SOON as Jarl Rognvald was safely established at Orphir and an armed truce negotiated by Bishop William betwixt him and Jarl Paul, Swain excused himself for the purpose of securing his vengeance upon Frakork and Olvir Rosta. Jarl Rognvald was ready to lend him men and ships for the expedition, but Swain declined all aid.

"They will have no help from Jarl Paul or others," he said, "and if I can not overcome them with my viking-farers, then, I shall be ready to have the hough piled on me."

He sailed from Orphir after dusk, hoping thus to elude any spies, and landed upon the coast of Caithness to the westward of Morkaorsbakki, where Frakork had her steading; but all his care was wasted, for he came down upon Morkaorsbakki to discover his birds flown. The skalli gaped empty; the furniture even had been removed; the out-houses were mere husks; there was not so much as an animal remaining for him. Only the sewn crops Frakork had not been able to carry off, and these she had destroyed for him by deliberately furrowing the planted fields.

Swain chewed down his rage, and with the breaking of dawn undertook to pick up his enemies' trail, but in this, too, he was only partially successful. The nearest folk in those parts told him that Frakork and Olvir, with all their people, had abandoned the steading some days since, Olvir traveling with the livestock and young men overland toward the Scots marches, and Frakork with the rest of their household going by longship along the coast. He hoped that Olvir might have been delayed by the size of his convoy, and decided to give chase over the hills into Sudrland; but Olvir had raised the Scots border chiefs as he passed the marches, and Swain was obliged to relinquish his plans of vengeance for the time being. He turned back with a heavy heart, and devoted his energies to parceling out his rewon lands amongst his followers.

This consumed several weeks, and the Summer was well advanced when he recrossed the Pentland Firth and steered *Deathbringer* through the inner waters to Orphir. He was amazed to see that Jarl Rognvald received him with a coldness in striking contrast to the warm confidence which had been showered upon him up to the day of his setting out for Morkaorsbakki, and there were even sneers from certain of the Jarl's Norse chieftains at his failure to trap his enemies.

"It seems that you succeed well enough, Swain, when you are with me," observed Jarl Rognvald, as they sat at the ale-drinking in the hall of the skalli that once had been Jarl Paul's. "But when you have not me with you your luck turns. Some men might see a reason in this."

"Some men are never satisfied," rejoined Swain, with surly indifference.

"I have been wondering, too, why you persuaded me to allow Jarl Paul to retain half of the islands," continued Jarl Rognvald. "It is inconvenient to be obliged to keep so many house-carls in arms. If we had slain him or driven him forth, instead of appealing to the bishop as you suggested, our troubles would have been at an end."

Swain grinned.

"Your troubles might have been at an end; ours would have just begun," he answered. "Men say with reason, two jarls rule with justice; one jarl rules with fear. But it occurs to me, Lord Jarl, that you were more than anxious to have me save the lives of your men by inducing Bishop William to compose peacefully your differences with Jarl Paul."

"That is a ridiculous idea, Swain," answered Jarl Rognvald. "I consented to your plan only because you told me so often of the cost in men I must pay if I fought with Jarl Paul. But from what has happened since you journeyed to Caithness I am convinced the Orkneymen are contented to have me for Jarl and would be glad to get rid of Jarl Paul, who spends all his time drinking and otter-hunting."

Swain sat quietly thinking for several moments before he replied.

"You are hard to please," he said, then, and presently left the skalli.

Jarl Rognvald was worried somewhat by the abruptness of his departure.

"This Swain is an ill man to have for enemy," he remarked to those with him, who were of his Norse following.

"He is no more than a small viking chieftain," they reassured him. "What does it matter to you, Lord Jarl, whether he is friendly or unfriendly? He will be obliged to stand your friend to satisfy his own interests."

"I am not so sure of that," returned Jarl Rognvald, who, although he frequently made mistakes, also learned quickly, as Swain had once said. "I would not have him against me for this ale-horn filled with gold."

As for Swain, he strode from the skalli in a very bad humor.

"I have made this Jarl, and put him where he is," he muttered to himself. "If this is the measure of his gratitude, I am of a mind to unseat him, and raise up another in his place."

Still in this mood, he crossed the island to Aurridaside, intending to visit his mother at Gairsey; but on the way he encountered Bishop William, journeying to preach before Jarl Rognvald and visit the church on Rognvaldsey, for it was Thursday and the next day a holy day.

"It is a sorry business that that witch Frakork and her grandson escaped you, Swain," said the bishop after they had exchanged greetings. "But I hear worse news than that."

"It would be difficult to think of worse news," Swain replied gruffly.

"Yet it is likely that you will agree with me when you hear it," insisted the bishop. "Men say that Jarl Rognvald shows favor only to those who came with him from Norway, and that these men have begun to speak badly of you without concealment."

"That is not news," answered Swain. "What they say can not hurt me, but what I do may send them back to Norway."

The bishop was interested.

"What will you do, Swain?" he asked, almost eagerly.

"I am going back to Orphir with you," replied Swain, and no more would he say.

When they came to Jarl Rognvald's skalli he tramped in beside Bishop William, hurling the house-carls right and left from his path as they traversed the great hall, where the tables were set for the evening meal.

"What is this, Swain?" called Jarl Rognvald angrily. "Why do you knock my men about in this fashion?"

And one or two of the young chiefs with him made to draw their swords; but Swain, with the bishop still beside him, walked up to the high table as if he had not heard the questions. When he was opposite to the Jarl's seat, he leaned his elbows on the table-edge, and stared at Rognvald, eye to eye, for as long as a man may without winking. The Jarl winked first.

"Have any of my men injured you, Swain?" asked the Jarl again, albeit more mildly.

"No, what harm could they do to me?" retorted Swain contemptuously. "They speak of me behind my back, but that does not injure me."

"I think you do them an injustice," defended the Jarl.

"Let them beware lest I do them hurt to their bodies," said Swain in his rough, booming voice that all in the skalli could hear. "But that was not what I returned for, Lord Jarl. Did I understand you when I was here earlier to say that you were sorry you had made a truce with Jarl Paul?"

"Why, as to that," returned Jarl Rognvald uneasily, "there is the truce—for which, it is true, I have you and Bishop William to thank—and I can not honorably——"

"We are not talking of honor," interrupted Swain. "I wish to know if you now begrudge Jarl Paul his half of the islands?"

"It is a poor arrangement," admitted the Jarl sullenly.

Swain turned to Bishop William.

"You are a wise clerk, Father Bishop," he said. "Tell me, is there truce betwixt me and Jarl Paul?"

The bishop's shrewd eyes probed his face, and looked away again.

"You are Jarl Rognvald's man," he said. "And as Jarl Rognvald has——"

"Yes," agreed Swain, "but Jarl Paul has outlawed me. Do you doubt he would have me slain could he catch me?"

"No," assented the bishop.

"What do you propose to do, Swain?" inquired Jarl Rognvald.

"That is to be seen," replied Swain. "But having failed of revenge upon two of my enemies, and being treated with ingratitude and scorn by those who should honor me, I am disposed to serve my own hand and seek vengeance otherwhere."

Saying which, he turned upon his heel and stamped out as roughly as he had entered. Jarl Rognvald called after him when he had reached the doorway, but the only answer Swain made was to cry over his shoulder—

"You shall see me again."

He sought *Deathbringer*, which lay off the beach at Orphir, with a full crew aboard, and drafted thirty of his best men. These he crowded into a ten-oared barge, a large, open boat, which was yet capable of navigating ordinarily rough seas. The dragon he left in command of Osbiorn Grim's son, with instructions to sail southeast at once for Lambaborg, and await him there. And then he put out in the barge, despite the gathering dusk, and coasted Hrossey until he made the open sea. Here he turned into the first lonely cove, and they rode out the night in comfort, wrapped warm in their fur sleeping-bags.

SWAIN roused the men before morning, and they pulled leisurely out to sea once more, coasting on northerly to the Efjusund, which separates Hrossey from Hrolfsey. They steered into the gut, and Swain bade all, except those required for the oars, lie down in the bottom under the sleeping-bags. In this position they looked to be a mass of cargo covered over to protect it from the spray, and indeed, the first men who sighted them from the shore supposed them to be merchants, and hailed them to put into Westness, where Jarl Paul and Sigurd and the other wealthy boendr would be glad to do business with them.

"Where is the Jarl this morning?" shouted Swain, steering closer in shore so that he could be heard.

The men who had hailed them pointed to a headland, which was distinguished by an enormous heap of stones and boulders that drifted from its summit to the water's edge.

"He came out with us this morning to hunt otters," one of them shouted back. "We have had fine sport. The place is full of them."

"If you are all out here, what use is there for me to continue on to Westness?" asked Swain.

"Oh, there are no more than twenty of us here," returned the man. "There are plenty of folk still at the skalli, and we shall be going home soon, for we have had little to eat, and the Jarl says he is thirsty."

This was as much as Swain wished to know, and he was resolved not to miss such an opportunity to strike the blow he had intended. He ran on to the eastward far enough to place a projection of the coast of Hrolfsey between him and the otter-hunters, and then he beached his barge and landed all his men.

They strung themselves into a line extending inland from the beach and trotted back toward the headland of the stoneheap. While they were still some distance from it they were seen by two men who raised the alarm, suspecting their purpose from the naked swords and spears they carried; and the otter-hunters scrambled up the wall of the headland and tried to escape inland. But Swain was ready for them. At an order from him, his men extended their line still farther and swung its right wing inward like a hook, blocking the fleeing men into the restricted area of the headland.

The figure of the Jarl was easily to be noted amongst the hunters by reason of the splendor of his dress. Like most of those with him he had left his sword at home, in order to make it easier for him to run and climb in and out of the stones under which the otters hid; he was helmless and had no shield, and his only weapon was a short spear and a knife. Nevertheless, he and his men did not show any cowardly fear. They grouped themselves together to facilitate their defense, and Jarl Paul called out lustily to Swain—

"There is peace between Jarl Rognvald and me."

"But not between you and me," replied Swain savagely.

"I will make you recompense for any wrongs you have suffered through me, Swain," the Jarl proffered again.

"It is too late for such talk," said Swain. "I am going to take the recompense in my own way."

The two parties were now within easy spear-cast of each other, and Jarl Paul perceived that they could not long withstand a conflict, so he made an offer for his men.

"Are you resolved to make me your prisoner?" he called.

"I am," answered Swain shortly.

"In that case, let my men go free, and I will accompany you wherever you say."

The smile on Swain's face was not pleasant to see.

"Ah, you are like all Jarls when they find themselves in difficulty," he commented. "You will seek the best terms. But I am not offering terms."

And he threw his spear and drove it through the chest of the man next to Jarl Paul.

"My people have done you no harm," cried the Jarl a second time. "Let them go. I will not resist you."

"Not one of them is to live," returned Swain. "Ho, viking-farers, slay me all of these people, except Jarl Paul. Him we take alive. If harm comes to him I will kill by slow torture the man who wrought it."

Jarl Paul and his folk were rendered desperate by this, and with a shrill yelp of hatred they charged Swain's line, endeavoring to breach an opening with a volley of short otter-spears. Several of Swain's men went down, and they came to close quarters, unarmored men, mostly equipped with skinning-knives, against armored men behind a shield-wall, wielding the terrible, straight, broad-bladed Norse sword. Heads, arms and legs bestrewed the ground, and the blood dappled the rocks before the fight was finished; but Swain paid dearly for it. Six of his men died to the nineteen who had attended Jarl Paul, and the Jarl was taken only by ringing him in with shields and casting the loop of a rope over his head. Kicking, biting, heaving himself about, they finally bound him securely, pitched him on the shoulders of two of the strongest, and returned by the way they had come to their boat.

Safe aboard the barge again, they stood out to sea from the gut, and retraced their course southward past Hrolfsey and through the channel between Haey and Grimsey, and then east by the Svelgr whirlpool—giving its swirling waters a wide berth—into the Pentland firth, and so south to Lambaborg on the ironbound coast of Caithness. The barge was only a little craft on that waste of restless waters, and whoever saw it deemed it a harmless merchantman. None of the watchers from the shore farms associated it with Swain Olaf's son. He left a blank trail. Nobody knew that he had been in those parts.

When Jarl Paul did not return to Westness at noon, Sigurd sent out men to find him, not even then suspecting that he had come to harm; but rather supposing that he had met with such good sport that he was loath to abandon it. The searchers followed the coast to the headland above the stone-heap, and found twenty-five dead men in a single pile. Nineteen of the slain were identified as the Jarl's men; the remaining six were unknown—as it chanced, they were young men from outlying islands of the Sudreyar,* who had attached themselves to Swain's fortunes and were strangers in the Orkneys.

Sigurd, himself, and others of Jarl Paul's friends hastened to the spot; but they could make no more of the scanty evidence available. Their first thought was that Jarl Rognvald had done it, and they sent hotfoot for Bishop William, who came and examined the bodies, formed his own suspicions and held his tongue. To placate Sigurd and avert a counter-attack upon Rognvald for the purpose of rescuing Jarl Paul, however, he crossed to Orphir and secured satisfactory proof that neither Rognvald nor any of his henchmen could have been implicated in the slaughter by the stone-heap. And for want of a better theory people of both the Jarl's factions fastened the guilt upon Frakork and Olvir Rosta.

The upshot was that everybody agreed Jarl Paul had vanished as completely as if he had been swallowed by a sea-monster, and Jarl Rognvald assumed sway over all the islands without a dissenting voice being raised, thanks, in part, to the zeal with which Bishop William supported the cathedral-builder. Occasionally, too, men wondered what had become of Swain Olaf's son, but they never suspected his connection with Jarl Paul's disappearance.

---

*Hebrides.

"We are well rid of that turbulent fellow," remarked Jarl Rognvald upon the occasion of one of his meetings with the bishop. "He was not without his uses to me at the beginning of this affair, but I soon was able to get along without him. A rough-tongued viking, with no real political skill, Father Bishop."

"Ah!" said Bishop William reflectively.

"He was loud in his threats against Jarl Paul the last time he came here," continued Jarl Rognvald. "Do you remember? You were with him. If he was here now he would be claiming that he had made away with Jarl Paul to put me in his debt."

"Humph!" said Bishop William. And after a pause:

"Do you think it wise to keep on all your Norse friends and their house-carls, Lord Jarl? The people complain that they are eating up the farms."

"No, there is no end to be served by their staying longer," replied Jarl Rognvald. "In truth, they were never necessary to me, for it is plain to all that the Orkney-folk were ready to accept me whenever I came. Never was Jarldom won more easily!"

"But touching your Norse friends?" Bishop William reminded him gently.

"They shall go next week, Father Bishop."

VIII

WHEN he had recovered his breath and canvassed the situation in which he found himself, Jarl Paul addressed Swain from where he lay in the bottom of the barge.

"This is a great wrong that you do, Swain," he cried. "I am your rightful lord. Your father was my friend, and I have augmented your family's fortunes. I have not deserved such treatment from you. Men will say evil things about you when it becomes known."

Swain relinquished the steering-oar to one of his men, and sat upon a thwart beside the Jarl.

"Nobody will ever know what has become of you," he answered coldly. "It will simply be said that you became tired of strife and retired into a monastery."

For the first time Jarl Paul was frightened.

"Do you intend to murder me?" he exclaimed.

Swain considered this question as if it were difficult to answer.

"I am not sure yet," he replied at last. "It depends upon how well you satisfy me."

"You are a man of great insolence!" returned Jarl Paul angrily. "I may be your prisoner, but I am a Jarl and a feudatory of the king, and you are an outlaw."

"I think that would be a question for the law-men to settle," said Swain. "The truth remains that you will meet the fate which seems best to me."

"But I do not see what purpose you can serve in carrying me off in this fashion," protested the Jarl. "If you do not kill me——"

"There are more ways than one of satisfying a need for vengeance," Swain commented. "I might mutilate you, and set you free. How much respect would men have for you if you were blind and dumb?"

Jarl Paul broke into a sweat which soaked through his garments. This was something he had never contemplated. Death he was not afraid to meet, but Swain's threat embodied a fate far worse than the most dreadful death.

"Not that, Swain," he begged involuntarily. "You shall name your own ransom—and I will take back the outlawry——"

"It is not necessary for you to remit my outlawry," said Swain. "You will never be Jarl again."

Jarl Paul stared up at the implacable blue eyes that gleamed above the ruddy growth of Swain's beard.

"Have I, indeed, earned your enmity to this extent?" he asked.

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"I am teaching a lesson in jarlcraft," he remarked with a kind of rude humor. "It is your misfortune that you happen to be necessary to my plans."

He refused to say any more, and climbed forward over the thwarts, leaving Jarl Paul to roll on the hard bottom-boards, drenched at intervals by the sea-spray and trodden on by the steersman and his mates. It was a humiliating experience, and the Jarl welcomed his transfer to *Deathbringer* at Lambaborg, for on the dragon he was laid under cover beneath the poop and given food and drink. But at Swain's command no man spoke to him.

Deathbringer ran south and east into the

Breida Firth* until they came to Ekkialsbakki. Here they put up the longship in a quiet cove, masked by trees, and Swain landed with Jarl Paul and twenty men, leaving the remainder of the crew aboard under Osbiorn Grim's son. Osbiorn's instructions were to avoid conflicts with the Scots and keep as secret as possible. Swain and his party pushed southward by private ways over the mountains into Atjoklar, explaining to such of the Scots folk as they met that they were going to visit Jarl Maddad, and so after several days they came safely to the castle of Atjokl, where dwelt Jarl Maddad and the Lady Margaret. And Swain blew the horn at the castle gate, and cried to the wradens who he was and that he had tidings for the Jarl's own ear.

Jarl Maddad and his lady came themselves into the courtyard to receive Swain, and considerable was their astonishment when they perceived Jarl Paul, with his hands bound behind him and his raiment stained and torn and thistle-burrs in his unkempt beard; but at a sign from Swain they withheld their speech and carried him privately into the hall of the castle, leaving Jarl Paul and Swain's men in the antechamber.

"I see that after all you need our alliance, Swain," said the Lady Margaret when they were all three seated at the high table.

"You could not help yourself without helping us—and without us to help you," added Jarl Maddad, rubbing his hands together gleefully.

Swain laughed—and Jarl Paul in the anteroom shook with fear at the hard mockery in his tone.

"What prattle is this!" he growled. "I use you to help myself—yes! I use any and all for that purpose, even that poor wretch who awaits his doom outside. You are not sorry for him, lady?" He turned suddenly upon Margaret. "Your eyes do not sting with tears for your brother?"

She returned his gaze unflinchingly.

"No brother of mine," she returned. "I never had anything from him except empty promises."

"Is that son of yours still anxious to go north and become a Norseman and a jarl?"

Jarl Maddad interfered.

"You speak as if you were master here, Swain."

"I am," rasped Swain.

Jarl Maddad colored with temper.

"You speak foolishly," he reproved. "I have but to whistle and two hundred men would assail your twenty, and take from you this prisoner you dared not hold alone."

Again Swain's sardonic laughter filled the hall.

"I dared not hold him alone! You do not know me, Lord Jarl. But let that pass. Do you think, perhaps, that *you* now hold the key to the Orkneys in your hands?"

"Who else?" answered the Lady Margaret, scowling. "If you brought Paul here your prisoner, he is now *our* prisoner. It is for us to drive what bargain we choose with him. Whatever part we allow you to take will be from courtesy or indulgence, and dependent upon your proper attitude."

"I have said I was teaching jarlcraft," said Swain, as if to himself, "but I had not reckoned upon teaching Scots Jarls. Be at your ease, lady. I knew you too well to venture my head here, unless I was safe from treachery."

"Treachery!" mouthed Jarl Maddad. "That is an ill word. There is no cause for it."

"I intend there shall not be," affirmed Swain. "Doubt it not, Lord Jarl, you and your lady, both. There is nothing you can do in this affair without me."

"You rate yourself highly," sneered Margaret, yet she changed color.

"I do," agreed Swain with composure. "You have heard that Jarl Rognvald is established at Orphir?"

"That is stale news."

"Yet important. Without Jarl Paul, Jarl Rognvald rules alone."

"So much a child can see," said Maddad impatiently.

"And it happens not to be my desire that he should rule alone," Swain pursued evenly. "Also, I would have a jarl or jarls I might be confident would do as I desired them."

"You want little enough," murmured Margaret in sarcasm.

"Very little," assented Swain. "I come to you for two reasons—it is in your interest to have Jarl Paul out of the way that your son may succeed him, and equally in your interest to put forward your son once Jarl Paul has been removed."

An ugly look dawned in Margaret's eyes.

"Out of the way?" she repeated. "Removed?"

---

*Moray Firth.

She made a quick motion with her forefinger, as if it were a dagger.

"That?"

Maddad, beside her, shuddered. Swain regarded her curiously.

"Of course, he is your brother," he observed.

"What does that matter?" she frowned. "He is in my way. Well, what do you say? Will your men do it—or shall mine?"

"I have no thought of mercy in my mind," returned Swain almost gently, "yet I am averse to slaying Jarl Paul."

"Why?"

"Dead, he is—dead. Alive—Jarl Rognvald will never quite forget him. He will be a protection for your son."

"But a live man may return to power," exclaimed Jarl Maddad.

"Not from a monastery, after such humiliation as Paul has undergone," answered Swain.

"So you would tonsure him?" cried the Lady Margaret.

"Even so."

"But if he will not consent?"

"There are threats to be used. I have hinted them to him."

Both Margaret and Maddad glowered at Swain in the dim light of the hall, their eyes burning with hatred; their mouths twitching with avarice.

"And why," said the woman very low, "should we suffer you to share longer in this?"

"Because you can not succeed without me."

"All that is necessary is that we wring the deed of succession from Paul," snarled Jarl Maddad. "Do you think you alone can inspire fear?"

"There is much more than that," replied Swain coolly. "After you have the deed, after Paul is disposed of, what then?"

They eyed him resentfully as wolves driven from a half-eaten deer.

"Why, take it to Rognvald," said Maddad with a hint of bluster.

Swain's mocking laugh rocked the hangings at his back.

"Yes, take it to Rognvald! And then?"

Maddad was silent, but the Lady Margaret nodded her head.

"Swain is right," she said. "That is, if even he can pry Rognvald loose from a full-won prize."

"Do you leave that to me," answered Swain.

IX

IT HAPPENED that there was a Thing meeting of all the boendr of the islands at Orphir in the early Fall for the settlement of the question of the rents and dues to be paid to Jarl Rognvald, and while the settlement was in full discussion, with no little feeling stirred up amongst the Jarl's retainers because of the increases he asked, there came a cry from some boys playing on the shore that a longship was approaching. And presently certain of the women called that they saw Swain Olaf's son standing on the poop.

Jarl Rognvald frowned, for he was in no very good humor that morning, and bade the speakers continue with the Thing, but many people left the meeting and walked to the strand, amongst them Bishop William, who was the first to greet Swain when he landed, leading a handsome young boy by the hand.

"You have been a long time gone, Swain," said the bishop, "and great things have happened since."

"You may take it that I am acquainted with them," responded Swain. "I have news for the Jarl and all the people."

"What is that?"

Swain spoke out, so that all around might hear him.

"I bring word from Jarl Paul to present to the Orkney-folk as his successor young Jarl Harald Maddad's son."

There was much murmuring and exclamation over this, and men sped off to carry the word to the Thing meeting in Jarl Rognvald's steading. But Bishop William smiled secretly, almost as if he was not surprized.

"Then you bring us tidings of what has become of Jarl Paul, Swain?" he asked.

"He is in a monastery of the white monks in Scotland."

"Strange," said Bishop William. "I should never have supposed him inclined to a monkish life."

"He could not be induced to leave it," answered Swain.

"I make no doubt," the bishop assured him. "There is a wondrous charm in the seclusion behind monastery walls—after the rough life of our northern world. But I suppose you have this amply attested, Swain?"

Swain pulled from his pouch a bewaxed and ribboned sheet of parchment.

"I am no clerk," he said, "so it must be for you to ascertain that, Father Bishop. This was given me for such an instrument."

The bishop perused it with pursed lips.

"It is so, no less," he admitted. "Yes, all regularly and in order, witnesses nominated by the King of Scots, the holy father abbot, himself, and the great Jarl Maddad of Atjoklar, Jarl Paul's own brother-in-law. Nothing could be clearer. But here comes Jarl Rognvald, so you may save your story for him."

In fact, the Thing meeting had broken up at the first shouting of Swain's momentous tidings, and the remainder of the boendr and the common men and herds of women and children were swarming down the hillside to the shore, led by Jarl Rognvald in person, with a look of red anger on his handsome face.

"Well, well, Swain," he exclaimed when he was come close by, "I hope you have not returned to make more trouble."

"No, Lord Jarl," answered Swain very respectfully. "I have come back very anxious to settle the troubles in the islands, once and for all."

"Troubles?" snapped the Jarl. "What troubles? There have been no troubles since you left."

"There is the question of Jarl Paul's succession——"

"I know nothing of it! Jarl Paul has gone away, nobody knows where. We have gotten along very peacefully without him."

"Nevertheless," insisted Swain as gently as the bishop might have spoken, "I bear here Jarl Paul's deed, renouncing his rights, lands and title to his nephew, Jarl Harald Maddad's son, whose parents have appointed me to foster him."

"What does that mean to us?" retorted Jarl Rognvald roughly. "It is only a piece of parchment with writing none of us can read. We did not even see anybody write it. For all we know, Jarl Paul has been dead many weeks. Frakork and Olvir Rosta carried him——"

"It was not Frakork and Olvir," Swain corrected him. "I carried away Jarl Paul."

A gasp went up from the people clustered around. Jarl Rognvald's jaw dropped. Of all those present only Bishop William heard Swain with a twinkle of amusement in his shrewd old eyes, and no sign of astonishment. But Jarl Rognvald was swift to see an opening for an assault upon Swain's statement.

"So!" he thundered. "You slew the Jarl in a period of truce! That was a wicked deed, Swain."

"I did not slay him," said Swain. "As for the truce, that was between you and Jarl Paul; and since Jarl Paul held me outlaw there could be no truce between us two. I carried him off unharmed to satisfy a private quarrel."

Some people laughed at this, and others applauded it. It was the first time an ordinary man like Swain, a small chieftain, had spoken so of a jarl, or, for that matter, had carried a quarrel with a great man so successfully to a conclusion. All through the assemblage men were muttering to each other and whispering:

"He is a clever fellow, this Swain!"

"There was never the like before in these lands!"

"A jarl doesn't mean much to him!"

Jarl Rognvald was bewildered.

"But why have you kept this quiet all these weeks, Swain?" he demanded.

"To give me time to carry out my plans," returned Swain.

"What plans?"

"Why, you complained, Lord Jarl, because the islands were divided between you and Jarl Paul, and indeed, it was plain the arrangement could not last indefinitely as there was bad blood on either side. So I set about it to remove Jarl Paul, in order that the people might have peace; but at the same time I saw that there was justice to be done where Jarl Paul was concerned. If he retired from his place, nevertheless it was right that he should nominate his successor, and it was necessary for me to journey with him into Scotland to discuss it with his nephew's family."

"It was not right for him to nominate a successor without consulting me," flared Jarl Rognvald. "I have been his successor."

There was a rumble of discontent from the crowd.

"You captured half the islands from him," Swain answered. "Not all of them."

"And it was Swain, not you, who captured Jarl Paul, himself," spoke up the bishop.

Jarl Rognvald turned to Bishop William. "This is a foolish business, Father

Bishop," he grumbled. "We had everything settled until Swain interfered with us. What are we to do about it?"

"I see no reason why you need to concern yourself," replied the bishop soothingly. "According to Jarl Paul's deed, young Jarl Harald is to take your advice in all things until he comes of age."

"Two jarls are best!" cried a voice from the outskirts of the throng, and other voices echoed the slogan.

"We had two jarls, and we still have two jarls," added Swain. "The only difference is that one of our jarls has been replaced by another."

Sigurd of Westness, who had been Jarl Paul's closest friend, shouldered his way out of the crowd.

"I am no friend to Swain," he said. "And he shall pay manbote for those of my folk he slew in taking Jarl Paul; but I hold with him in this—that if Jarl Paul has made over his Jarldom to Harald Maddad's son or any other heir, it is for all of us to recognize his will in the matter. And those of us who fought for Jarl Paul will give you fair warning, Lord Jarl, that you must be fair toward young Jarl Harald, more especially if you desire the increased taxes and our help in building the minster you have vowed to St. Magnus."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Bishop William hastily. "We must not forget that all the folk are to help build the minster, Lord Jarl, and for that we require peace."

"Touching Sigurd's claim of manbote, I admit it," said Swain. "And I say here, before you all, that I will settle any claims adjudged against me, excepting alone from Frakork and Olvir Rosta. I have ended my quarrel with Jarl Paul and all his folk."

Jarl Rognvald burst out laughing, for he saw how the tide trended and he determined to go with it.

"Here is my hand, and peace with it, Swain," he cried. "There is no beating you, and I would rather you were my friend than my enemy. It is my opinion that you studied this out to have it happen exactly as it has."

"I have done no more than take the vengeance due me," rejoined Swain.

"You take a full measure," observed the Jarl dryly.

"It may be there was a lesson or two for others thrown in," answered Swain.

And this is the story of how Jarl Rognvald came to the Orkneys a second time, and how Jarl Paul was cast out from his place and young Jarl Harald Maddad's son was elevated to succeed him, from which events others were to flow in future years, as will be set down in the proper order; as also, how Swain Olaf's son won to be inlawed in the islands and became the greatest man in the North. It is to be said of Swain that after he procured the replacement of Jarl Paul by young Jarl Harald he had no more difficulty with Jarl Rognvald, for Jarl Rognvald told frankly any who brought complaints to him against Swain that he could not afford to have such an enemy.

"What is a jarl to Swain?" he would ask.

And the common folk made a saying of it, too, so that if a man mowed a field of hay speedily or caught his boat full of fish or did any kind of a thorough job they called it a "Swain's vengeance."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

HE MISSED fire on us when his first story appeared in our magazine, but Henry W. Patterson follows Camp-Fire custom on the occasion of his second and rises to introduce himself:

Wayland, Mass.

I have lived here in Wayland for twenty-two years. (If I like it I think I'll stay.) During that time I have traveled in Canada, the West, the South, various countries of Europe, the West Indies, Panama and South America. Spent some time in Ontario and Washington (Olympic Mountains). Intend to see both those places again before I die, if I can.

I spent the last two years of the war in the French army, first as an ammunition truck driver, then as a private and later an "aspirant" (cadet officer) in the Field Artillery, and finally as an observer in the Aviation Corps.

After the war I finished my college course, got a job on the editorial staff of the *Youth's Companion*, and married.—HENRY W. PATTERSON.

A LOOK-IN on a bit of frontier history. The other day I had a look at a diary kept by a young officer in Colonial days, from which it was evident that it was at least sometimes a custom, when hard pressed for footwear in the wilderness, to make use of Indian skins for leather. A pleasant habit, but emergency knows no niceties.

Spencer, West Virginia.

I would like to make a few remarks regarding an article by Mr. Barker in the Feb. 20 issue, entitled "Took Two Scalps at Seventy-six."

David Morgan (not Obed) as the author has it, was at the time of the fight referred to by the author not over sixty-five years of age at the very most, but had been suffering from rheumatism, so he sent his children, Stephen and Sarah, to feed the cattle about a mile from Pritchett's fort, where they spent the night as was the habit of the settlers in that neighborhood. Soon after the children had gone, Mr. Morgan went to bed and dreamed he saw his children walking in the fort yard, scalped. This bothered him and, taking his gun, he followed the children. Then the fight occurred in which Morgan killed one of the Indians and severely wounded the other, who was killed by the people at the fort. And, horrible as it may seem, these Indians were skinned, the hide tanned and made into saddle-bags and shot-pouches. My grandfather informs me that he has seen one of the shot-pouches (now owned by a distance relative of Morgan's).

A few years ago a monument was erected by Morgan's descendants at the spot where the first Indian was killed. David Morgan was a relative of Daniel Morgan of Revolutionary fame.—C. E. DOUGLAS.

ARE our writers still letting their characters hit people with the butts of their guns? We've tried hard to cut this stunt out of our stories, though maybe we've nodded. As to long-barreled Colts and flaps I'm not so sure. Have written Mr. Stuart whether he's sure it was our magazine that did these things and, if so, to tell us the particular instances. The matter of hitting with the butt has already been discussed several times at Camp-Fire, with unanimous verdict against it in this country, though the butt seems to be used where short automatics are the common weapon.

Dallas, Texas.

Advise some of your writers of Western stories to soft-pedal on always having their heroes using "two long-barreled Colts." Possibly there have been some gun-fighters who have used the "long-barreled Colt." but I couldn't bet on their living very long.

I HAVE known the border from New Mexico to Brownsville, Texas, for the last 30 years. Personally, I have held commissions as "special officer," deputy sheriff, United States deputy marshal and as "Texas Ranger." I have never seen a peace officer of any kind, or cattle man, use a "long-barreled Colt." A .45 caliber Colt doesn't need a long barrel either for range or accuracy.

It two equally good "gun men" had a difficulty and one had a "long-barreled Colt" and the other had a "short-barreled Colt," the man with the "short barrel" would win out every time. A fraction of a second gained in the "draw" would win.

Also, impress some of these writers with the fact that no man but a fool would ever hit a man with the "butt" of his gun. Tap a man over the head with the barrel of a heavy gun, and you will not need an ax. Hitting a man with the barrel, leaves the butt in your hand where it belongs—ready for another "tap," or to shoot. Might also remind the same writers that no man who knows how to use a gun ever carries it in a holster with a "flap"—unless he wishes to commit suicide, or is a soldier. These little mistakes often spoil an otherwise rattling good story.—F. J. STUART.

Many Murders in Texas

"In 1922 there were more murders in the state of Texas than in the entire British empire during the last twenty years," said the governor. "We average, in this state, *more than 200 homicides annually for each million population*, while the ratio per million of France is 17, Germany 12, and Canada 5.

"In England 95 per cent. of the law violators are convicted, and in the grand old state of Texas there *is less than* 2 per cent. of convictions for violation of the law," he continued.

Governor Neff rapped the suspended sentence law by showing that 4,000 *criminals* had been convicted and turned loose in Texas during the *last two years*.—Dallas *Times-Herald*, Speech by Gov. Pat. Neff.

THIS letter, written April fourteenth, by one of the two making the trip, tells of the first boat to transit the Panama Canal under sail. Sometimes I wish there were a flag carrying our Camp-Fire insignia to be taken on trips like this by comrades of the Camp-Fire.

Balboa Heights, C. Z.

I take great pleasure in writing to you informing you about the first sailing-ship to transit the Panama Canal, under sail, a few days ago. The trip was made in an 18-foot canoe with a mainsail and jib, and completed the trip in the record time of 10 hours and 25 minutes. The start was made from Cristobal, on the Atlantic side of the canal, at 6 o'clock in the morning, just at the break of day, and the finish at 8:45 that same evening at Balboa, on the Pacific end of the canal, transiting the canal and all three locks, Gatun, Pedro Miguel and Miraflores.

THE occupants of the canoe were Lieut. Miller, Assistant Commandant, Fifteenth Naval District, Canal Zone; and H. J. Grieser, Swimming Director, Panama Canal, who had on previous occasions rowed, paddled and motored through the canal, with a motor attached to the stern of a 14-foot rowboat.

The interesting points of the first sailing trip through the canal were getting locked through the big locks with the big ships of every type and of all nations—tankers, cargo ships, naval tugs, Army transports, passenger ships, the following nations being represented: Japan, Holland, England, Colombia, Chile, France and United States.

The sail across the dying forest of Gatun Lake, the largest artificial lake in the world, was with all kinds of breezes. At times our little craft was subjected to many considerable waves which washed into the boat from the heavy sea. We Arrived at Gatun Locks at 7:45 and left Gatun, after being locked through and making repairs, at ten minutes of ten, and arrived at Pedro Miguel at 5:50 P.M., a distance of about 27 miles, 9 miles of this distance being through the famous Culebra Cut. In this cut the wind came through with great velocity and assisted us on our way. Our greatest speed was made in this cut.

In Gatun Lake, where the wind was at its height, part of our mainsail was torn off by the gaff. On account of the excessive heat from the sun and the reflection on the water we took great care in protecting our eyes. Our faces were covered with a mixture of zinc ointment, charcoal, vaseline and paraffin, making us a good subject for a minstrel show.

THE food we took consisted of 1 orange apiece and 1 apple and 1 sandwich, not touching a drop of water during the entire day. We had planned to eat lunch at 12, but owing to busy time with our sails and in order to make the locks before dark we did not have time to partake of anything more, although we carried plenty.

The great amount of evaporation of water from Gatun Lake was demonstrated during our trip through, as we bailed very little on account of the sun evaporating the water in the canoe.

An interesting feature of the trip is that we remained within the channel buoyed for all vessels, even while crossing Gatun Lake.

Alligators are plentiful in the Lake, but did not disturb us. Another interesting feature was the canoe in which we made the voyage. The canoe has sailed in the Black Sea, Baltic Sea and North Sea, Mediterranean, east and west coasts of North America, Hawaii, Azores and the Panama Canal. The tolls on the canoe were 72 cents, net.—H. J. GRIESER.

NONE of us has much respect for a man who will take two cents away from a friend or from some one who is doing him a favor free of charge. That kind of fellow is pretty small potatoes, isn't he? Sure, you say. All right, please read this from a personal letter Hugh Pendexter wrote me about other matters:

> Out of twenty-odd letters this A.M. one enclosed a stamp. Almost all of them desired information. It's funny. From professional men, merchants, Fifth Avenue bank, etc.

Here's Hugh Pendexter spending hours of his time writing out information for people who asked for it. Strangers to him. He doesn't offer himself as a source of information. He doesn't answer for his own amusement or to kill idle time. He has plenty of his own affairs to fill his time. He works for his living like most of the rest of us. (If any one thinks it isn't work to write fiction, particularly fiction built on historical data, let him ask some one who does it.) He answers just out of good fellowship and friendliness.

It seems sort of rough that in addition to giving up enough of his time to write some twenty letters a day—which means quite a *lot* of time—he should have to pay about forty cents a day for the privilege. That's considerably over a hundred dollars a year. Plus paper and envelopes for some five or six thousand letters. Of course twenty is probably more than he gets every week-day but I know the average is very high.

NOW how many of *you* are willing to give out free information to strangers—or friends—for the asking at the rate of even ten letters a day, 3,000 letters a year, and furnish the stationery and $60 worth of stamps in addition to your time, labor and freely dispensed specialist knowledge acquired by a life-time of hard work?

For heaven's sake think of the other fellow. And try to realize you're not the only one asking favors of him.

I wonder how many of that twenty had the decency to save Hugh Pendexter a little trouble by enclosing a self-addressed envelope even without a stamp.

He didn't ask me to bring the matter to Camp-Fire's attention. It was merely a casual mention in a letter about other things. But I'm mighty glad to call it to everybody's attention. A lot of you treat our "A.A." editors the same way. I call it rather cheap work. Thoughtlessness mostly, but the fellow who does it is always open to at least some suspicion of being a grafter of very small caliber.

WHERE is Tecumseh buried? Here are some interesting theories concerning that famous chief:

Rocanville, Sask., Canada.

I was born and lived twenty years at Moraviantown in Ontario where Tecumseh met his death. In fact my father's farm is on the west side of the battle-field. There are yarns, as I have later discovered to be true, of a large amount of gold coin Tecumseh was in charge of during his retreat down or rather up the Thames, which he buried at the beginning of the battle. As perhaps most of you interested in our Indian history know, no one knows for certain where Tecumseh is buried, although the Canadian Government and numerous historical societies have searched for years. Yet it is certain that there are Indians still living, descendants of those who took part in the battle, who do know but refuse to tell. The secret is handed down from father to son, and believe me it is a secret.

OLD Indians give an altogether different version from start to finish of the whole affair. One grizzled old-timer who, if you are careful and approved of by him, will show you American scalps taken during 1812-14 by his grandfather, affirms that the local, Moravian Mission, Indians were not friendly to the Shawnee warrior and angry on account of bringing them into the fight (which they could not well get out of, it being fought on their reservation). He also told me of their jealousy toward Tecumseh, for at that time he was very powerful in Canada and had been decorated by Sir Isaac Brock. He also tells that Tecumpeth or Tecumsee as he is sometimes called, *was not killed in the battle, but after it* by a Delaware Moravian Indian in a teepee where they had taken shelter after outdistancing the victors. He said that the Delaware approached him and blamed him for causing the loss of a great many Moravian Indians as well as the burning of the town, after which he tomahawked him.

Now don't think that I want to start an argument or anything of that nature. Far from it. Personally I consider it an interesting version of the death of Tecumseh. But the old man was in earnest.

BY THE way, I think I noticed in *Adventure* possibly three or five years ago the statement of a reader whose grandfather or some relative had killed Tecumseh. Also a very weird description of it given. But that the Canadian Indians were jealous of him is an indisputable fact. There is also the tale of his being killed in battle in the regular way. And two lesser chiefs (I have their names and other particulars at home) who picked him up as soon as he fell, also his weapons, and carried him out of the thick of the fight to where a beech tree had been blown over by the wind, tearing up a large quantity of earth in the roots and leaving a hole in the ground. They placed him and his weapons in the hole in the ground. They then chopped the tree in two near the roots. As every one knows who has ever had any experience in the bush, the tree will then return to its original position, thus making a very efficient grave. I would be pleased to hear from any one, as Canadian history is one of my hobbies, but I fear I have taken too much space, so will say *Sagolee*.—J. D. TINLINE.

THERE'S sound sense in the following from E. E. Harriman. An "outlaw" is one whom ordinary humans have cast out because he won't play the game, because they consider him unfit to live with regular people. He's not a hero.

If he has any redeeming traits, like courage, alertness, etc., he survives and there's a silly tendency to glorify him because of these traits, forgetting that the majority of law-abiding citizens also have them, though generally without a stage for their display. If the outlaw hasn't even these redeeming traits, he doesn't survive, we never hear of him and when we think of outlaws we think of the other kind. All of which helps along the foolish tendency to glorify.

After all, an outlaw is generally a fellow who commits some outrage against his fellows but hasn't guts enough to pay the bill.

Several years ago I had two good talks with Bill Tilghman, one of the men most responsible for the cleaning out of the outlaws in Oklahoma. Bill is big, husky and quiet, a man to be trusted implicitly. He knows outlaws and their ways, criminals of all the Western types. He has handled them all, rustlers, horsethieves, bankrobber, bandits.

"IF THE people only knew it, the biggest danger to young men and boys lies in their getting to admire an outlaw. They look at his escapades as adventuring. They admire his nerve, his resourcefulness, his accurate shooting, wild riding and endurance. They forget all the rest after awhile and begin to think the life fine.

"They never stop to think about the strain he is under, night and day, the constant danger, the exposure and suffering, the invariable end in a miserable death or imprisonment. They don't see the real facts of a life like that of a wolf, hunted by all men, unable to get any comfort, to live decently. They forget about the sordid part, the misery and pain and contempt endured.

"The men who go about the country, posing as heroes, because they were once robbers, are a menace. They show the boys the glamour and glitter, without revealing one iota of the other side. They are the propagandists of crime, giving to boys a wrong impression. They ought to be stopped. The boys should be shown the truth of the matter.

"They never hear much about the officer who risks his life daily, in order that there may be security for the mass of the people. They know very little about men of the law who shoot it out, one against many often, to rid the country of the lawless. It isn't right."

BILL was right. There is a tendency among a good many of us to put the outlaw on a pedestal, when he should be in the sub-cellar.

We praise the Mounted Police of Canada, but how many of us pay any mind to the State Police of Pennsylvania? We applaud the lone officer who staggered out of a sick bed and held a bridgehead alone, against a gang of ruffians in Alberta, but forget plain Bill Sparks who, with three other plain officers, backed down nine professional killers in Arizona and forced them to sit down with their backs to the lawful gunmen. We get excited over the return of an outlaw to carry off a wounded companion, in the face of rifle fire, but say little about Paul Curry, a youth who did not claim to be an expert shot, yet took a rifle from a scared citizen twice his age and plugged two of the bandit gang engaged in robbing a bank, one of them being Henry Starr himself, leader of the gang. So it is, all too often.

IT IS a strange thing that the average man who hates the law, is the readiest to invoke its aid and protection, when he thinks himself unduly imposed on. Where the average redblooded man of honest habit will prefer to settle such matters with a simple matching of muscle, the anarchistic blowhard will yell for the police.

It has been my fortune to face various men of that sort, singly, in pairs, trios and in bunches. I have heard them say many a time, "If you touch me I'll have the law on ye!" right after damning all law and vowing they would rather have no law save that of might.

To my mind, we owe to the courage and loyalty of honest men the entire fabric of our national life, while all we owe to the outlaw is the grave. I protest against the laudation of criminals and the all too frequent sneers at policemen, sheriffs, marshals, constables and the like. We owe the guardians of the peace loyal support, for they are fighting for our rights, against men who would rob us without a grain of compunction.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

AS YOU know, F. St. Mars has been dead nearly two years. We had on hand a good many of his stories, but these have by now all been published. Following the gradual using up of these stories there grew among you a renewed demand for more by the same author. A chance now arises to secure a few more St. Mars stories that have appeared in English but not in American magazines—as had some of those previously used by us. We have already bought one of these and hope to secure more, always on the basis of your continuing interest.

HERE is Bulletin No. 6 issued by the U. S. Revolver Ass'n, 14 West 48th Street, New York City. Other bulletins of like nature are issued by them and are worth getting as ammunition against the foolish and dangerous anti-weapon laws now being urged upon us. The uniform law advocated in this bulletin omits the objectionable features of these proposed laws and promises to be as effective as any law can be toward disarming the crook yet leaving means of defense to the law-abiding citizen.

Remember, however, that the Revolver Ass'n itself admits that *any* prohibitory law operates in favor of the criminal and against the law-abiding citizen. They advocate the law they do because it tends to uniform legislation and to common-sense instead of fanatic restrictions. It seems at least better than the other laws proposed. Personally I resent any such law as contrary to the spirit of the Constitution of the United States which assures citizens against infringement of their right to have and bear arms. While *Field and Stream* admits it is the best of the lot, still it is open to improvement, and they do not support this bill advocated by the Revolver Ass'n, feeling that the highly probable chances of its being amended, modified and so on in the various State Legislatures would destroy the better features as originally drafted. I give you the U. S. R. A. bill because every American should be familiar with all efforts against the anti-weapon fanatics, supporting whatever campaign seems to him the best.

Remember that *Field and Stream*, 25 West 45th Street, New York City, is conducting a systematic, organized campaign against these obnoxious anti-weapon laws. Write to them and give them your support.

The criminal will be armed in spite of the law.

Laws prohibiting pistols and revolvers operate in favor of the criminal and against the law-abiding citizen.

ANY law prohibiting the manufacture, sale or ownership of pistols and revolvers would operate in favor of the criminal and against the law-abiding citizen.

No such law could effectively be enforced against the criminal who will always be able to obtain a weapon of this description.

There would be created by such a law the undesirable but highly remunerative industry of pistol bootlegging and thousands of weapons would be smuggled over our border and through our ports.

If all other means of obtaining weapons failed, the criminal could easily make his own pistol. All that is required is a small-bore rifle and a few simple tools obtainable at any hardware store.

ON THE other hand, the reputable citizen, obeying the law, would be deprived of his most convenient and effective means of defense against housebreakers or highwaymen.

Knowing this, the criminal with his unlawfully obtained pistol in his pocket, would be absolutely safe in the pursuit of his calling.

Furthermore, a law prohibiting the manufacture and sale of weapons of this description would operate to the detriment of the Government in the carrying out of any preparedness program.

THE Government has very limited facilities for manufacturing the pistols and revolvers needed for the Army, Navy and Marine Corps. It must depend to a very large extent on private manufacturers.

The demand for weapons of the type used in the military and naval service is not sufficient in time of peace to warrant the Government making the heavy investment necessary to establish its own plants for revolver manufacture. In time of war, as was demonstrated, it is impossible to obtain the highly skilled gunsmiths required for the work.

Consequently the private manufacturers of pistols and revolvers who make the service types, voluntarily keep a portion of their plants ready at all times for Government work and the maintenance of this idle machinery is borne by the portions of the plants in which the commercial and police weapons are made.

To prohibit the manufacture of the commercial and police weapons would be to deprive the Government of very necessary facilities, especially at this time when the new Army regulations call for the increased use of pistols as a result of experience gained in the war.

WHAT this country needs in connection with this matter is not prohibitory laws nor unduly restrictive laws, but a law uniform in all States which will make it plain to the criminal that while every reputable citizen has the legal right to obtain and keep in his home or place of business a pistol or revolver, the criminal has no such right.

The law should provide further that no pistol or revolver may be carried concealed on the person or in a vehicle unless its owner shall have obtained a license from a designated authority.

Furthermore, the law should provide penalties so severe that even criminals will hesitate to violate it.

In no other way can the criminal use of pistols and revolvers successfully be curbed.

IT IS for the purpose of preventing the unauthorized carrying of pistols and revolvers and, as far as possible, keeping such weapons out of the hands of criminals, that the United States Revolver Association is endeavoring to have a Uniform Law enacted by all of the States.

Briefly, the proposed law provides that:

"None but citizens, personally known, or properly identified to a licensed dealer in firearms, are permitted to purchase pistols or revolvers. A record of sale must be filed with the police.

"No pistol or revolver may be delivered to the purchaser until the day after the sale.

"Owners of such firearms are not permitted to carry them on their persons or in a vehicle without a license from the police.

"Dealers are not permitted to display pistols or revolvers, or imitations thereof, where they can be seen from the outside of the store.

"Possession of a pocket firearm by a person committing or attempting to commit a felony, is regarded as prima facie evidence of criminal intent, and is punishable by a mandatory sentence of five years' extra imprisonment.

"Heavy penalties are prescribed for second and third offenders. Fourth offenders may be sentenced to life imprisonment.

"Manufacturers' serial numbers or other identifying marks on pistols or revolvers must not be altered or erased.

"Aliens and persons who have been convicted of a felony are not permitted to possess a pistol or revolver."

THE proposed Uniform Law is based on the Capper Bill (S. 4012) now before the United States Senate, and the Zihlman Bill (H. R. 14116) in the House of Representatives, for application in the District of Columbia.

The bill has already been presented in the legislatures of many States and will be offered for introduction in all States where legislatures at present are in session.

It has been endorsed by the International Association as the measure best calculated to accomplish the desired purpose and, regardless of its drastic provisions, it is believed by competent authorities to be capable of enforcement.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 T Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: Over one hundred issues ranging from 1918 to 1923. They ain't in A. 1. perfect condition—they're mostly dog-eared—but every cover is on 'em. Five cents each. This don't nohow include postage.—Address H. WELCH, 400 Main St., Weehawken P. O., N. J.

WILL SELL: All issues from Oct., 1913 to, and including, March 30th., 1923. All in good condition. What offers?—Address JOHN H. MACKEY, 31 E. Ashley St., Jacksonville, Fla.

WILL SELL: Oct., Nov., Dec., 1914; Jan., June, Oct., Dec., 1915; April, May, June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., 1916; Jan., Feb., Mch., Apl., May, June, 1917: all 1920, except May; all 1922; all 1923 to date. Twenty cents per copy.—Address C. E. DOUGLAS, R. F. D. 1, Parkersburg, W. Va

WILL SELL: 1st Sept., 1921 to 1st Jan., 1922; Jan. 20th., Apl., 10th., June 10th., July 10th. and 20th., all Aug., and Sept., Oct. 20th., 1922. All 1923. In good condition. Five dollars, post-paid.—Address WALTER D. BELL, Berrien Springs, Mich.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails*)

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Addresses

Camp Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, 3633 New Hampshire Ave., N. W., Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico and Virgin Group
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage ten cents.*)

7. South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).
CHARLES BROWN, JR., P. O. Box 308, San Francisco, Calif. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

8. ★ Australia and Tasmania
FRANK MORTON, care *Triad* magazine, 19 Castlereagh St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage ten cents.*)

9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

10. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (*Postage ten cents*).

11. Philippine Islands.
BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzite, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

12. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with ten cents in stamps NOT attached*)

13. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

14. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
Captain Beverley Giddings, Morgan City, La. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

15. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
Gordon MacCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters
Captain C. L. Oliver, care *Adventure*. Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

17. Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan
George W. Twomey, M. D., 41 Rue de France, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting.

18. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
Robert Simpson, care *Adventure*. Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

19. ✠ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
Charles Beadle, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

20. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
Captain F. J. Franklin, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

21. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

22. Africa Part 5 Morocco
George E. Holt, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

23. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
Captain Beverley Giddings, Morgan City, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

24. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

25. Africa Part 8 Sudan
W. T. Moffat, 38 Bessborough St., Westminster, London, S. W. 1., England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history.

26. Turkey and Asia Minor
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

27. Bulgaria, Roumania
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

28. Albania
Robert S. Townsend, care *Adventure*. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

29. Jugo-Slavia and Greece
Lieut. William Jenna, Camp Alfred Vail, Oceanport, N. J. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

30. Scandinavia
Robert S. Townsend, care *Adventure*. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

31. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
Fred F. Fleischer, 426 15th St., West New York, N. J. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

32. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
Edgar Young, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topograply, minerals, game, languages, customs.

33. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
Dr. H. N. Whitford, School of Forestry, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

34. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
William R. Barbour, Room 424 Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information.

35. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

36. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

37. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, Santa Clara, Calif. Lower California. Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan; Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

38. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land and Northern Quebec
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Also Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

39. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

40. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
George L. Catton, 94 Metcalfe St., Woodstock, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. *Postage 3 cents.*)

41. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

42. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
Ed. L. Carson, Monroe, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

43. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

44. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

45. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, 1436 Hawthorne Terrace, Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, backpacking, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

46. Baffinland and Greenland
Victor Shaw, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

47. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

48. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance, oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

49. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
Frank Middleton, 705 So. 1st St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

50. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.
Chester C. Davis, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

51. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
Otto M. Jones, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with three cents in stamps—in Mr. Beadle's case twelve cents—NOT attached*)

52. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

53. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
Joseph Mills Hanson (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

54. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

55. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

56. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

57. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs fresh-water pearls, herbs.

58. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
Howard A. Shannon, 631 East Fifth Street, Chattanooga, Tenn. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

59. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
Howard A. Shannon, 631 East Fifth Street, Chattanooga, Tenn. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

60. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
William R. Barbour, Room 424 Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

61. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala. Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
Hapsburg Liebe, Box 432, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

62. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus. invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, 1,262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—**All Shotguns,** including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury Street, Boston, Mass.

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers,** including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Tropical Forestry

Dr. H. N. Whitford, School of Forestry, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

G.—Aviation

Major W. G. Schauffler, Jr., National Aeronautic Association, 26 Jackson Place, Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

H.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. Cox, care *Adventure.*

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions,** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines**. **Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santa Domingo** and **Haiti,** the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii,** Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba,** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle Association** of America, Brig. Gen. **Fred H.** Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver Ass'n.** W. A. Morrall, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Hunting-Cheetahs

A CAT with the disposition of a dog:

Question:—"I am taking the liberty of asking you for all information regarding the cheetah or hunting-leopard as they are used in India—whether they are used for hunting the same as dogs, where they can be bought in this country, price for cubs, and also danger connected with handling them."—Harry N. Robben, Cleveland, O.

Answer, by Capt. Giddings:—The best hunting-cheetah it was ever my pleasure to follow belonged to Major McPherson, a retired officer living in India. This was an extremely efficient animal, raised and trained by the major, and very gentle. I, however, could not get over my feeling of distrust for the animal, and for this reason I think it regarded me with the most unfriendly suspicion. I know it cherished a violent hatred for my Airedale.

Major McPherson experienced no difficulty in handling his animal, and I must confess that it never even threatened me.

Though classed with the leopard tribe, a cheetah seems to me peculiarly dog-like; and it is to this, I firmly believe, that it owes its popularity with some hunters. There can be no doubt as to its ability in the hunting line; I was thoroughly convinced on this point in short order.

Your only chance to get a cub in this country would be from some circus—and then you could scarcely use it here, could you?

The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Cruising Georgian Bay

IN AND out among the Ten Thousand Islands—great!

Question:—"My husband and I want to take a trip this Summer and figure on Canada as the ideal place. About five years ago I made a flying trip to Parry Sound, Georgian Bay, spending only two days and a night there. Ever since I have longed to return for a longer visit. We reached it by train from Toronto, but left by a little steamboat, which took us through the Ten Thousand Islands of the bay. Never have I forgotten the sheer beauty of those islands on that August morning!

My idea for the trip is something like this: Hire or buy a canoe at Parry Sound and go all in among the uninhabited islands, spending a day on this one, a night on that one and the next on some other one.

I would like to ask you the rental price of a canoe for say two or three weeks. Also whether you would consider it better to buy one and the price.

Then too would a canoe be adequate? Should we have a little motor-boat? Could one of them be rented, and how much? How much to buy one?

Also, what would you consider the possible dangers of such a trip? We can both swim and handle a canoe—after the fashion of city people of course—but I guess we could get along.

My husband understands a small motor-boat. How about a tiny sail-boat? Mr. Cobb prefers sails to motors.

We might take another couple with us, especially if they would help in any way. Don't let me give you the idea expense is not to be considered. *It is!*

What kind of firearms would you advise taking? Would we be likely to meet many people? The less people the better; we see enough in the Winter.

Would not July be the best month? If so, why? If not, why?

What would be the best and least expensive way to get there? We might be able to commandeer an automobile if it would be any great aid.

Please tell me anything else you think might be of help or interest. Don't you think it is a good plan?"—GLADYS DEH. COBB (MRS. ARTHUR F.), Philadelphia, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—Your plan for a cruise through the Ten Thousand Islands of Georgian Bay is O. K. In fact, I know of no better way of spending your holidays. Particularly if you take your camera and fishing-tackle along.

But if you could postpone it till say the last week in July and the first two weeks in August you would enjoy it more. The flies and mosquitoes would not be so numerous then. In any case, include mosquito netting and "dope" in your kit.

Now as to the cheapest way to reach your starting-point. The railroad to Parry Sound *via* Toronto would be the best and quickest. The motor roads north of Toronto are not of the best, and you'd find the cost would exceed railroad fares. If you travel by motor be sure to get a Rand McNally motor map of the district.

For a canoe you will pay anywhere from fifty dollars up, new. Second-hand canoes may be purchased, but I wouldn't advise you to trust them. Eatons, Toronto, put up usually a good serviceable craft for around fifty dollars.

Yes, you may rent a canoe at a rental of around a dollar a day; but if you were leaving the vicinity of the town you would be required to leave a deposit equaling the value of the craft. My advice would be to purchase a new one and then sell it for what you could get for it when you were through with it. Don't take chances on a poor boat!

Motor-craft, from outboard motors on skiffs and canoes to fine launches, new and second-hand, may be purchased from two hundred dollars up—mostly up. But the same advice applies to these craft, too. Don't take chances.

The easiest way to travel would be of course by motor-boat, especially as you have but three short weeks and it's a long trip when you cruise in and out among the islands; and the cheapest of the motor-driven craft would be an outboard motor on either a skiff or large canoe. Would advise you to write the T. Eaton Co., Toronto, Ont., for their 1923 prices on canoes and skiffs and outboard motors laid down in Parry Sound. You will get a good idea then on what it will cost you. Wouldn't advise sail-craft at all for this trip; the winds are not dependable, and you can't go and come at pleasure.

Paddling a canoe would be all right—if you both know how to handle this craft. But remember that you have only three weeks—or whatever time you may have—and the only means you will have of making progress will be your own arms. Personally I prefer this means—when I have all the time there is ahead of me.

And just here I would sound a note of warning. Don't buy anything more than you can help in Parry Sound. I lived there for nearly a month three years ago, and I was stung on everything I bought. A canoe, fourteen-foot at least, would be adequate for two if you didn't carry too much in the way of kit or dunnage.

The dangers, as you call them, would not be alarming.

Many of the islands are inhabited in the Summer, and there are lots of Summer resorts and cottages along the mainland; there are no wild animals to molest you at this season of the year, aside from the flies and mosquitoes; and if you keep close in to land in threatening weather there is nothing to worry about on that score. The thing is to know how to handle your craft—and don't worry.

Firearms are entirely unnecessary; in fact you would need a permit to carry more than a revolver—if you were even allowed to carry that without a permit.

Yes, you would be likely to meet quite a lot of people in the immediate vicinity of the big Summer resorts; otherwise no. It all depends on whether you want to meet many folks. If you don't want to meet them, you won't. You can be as isolated as you wish.

Now if you decide on going and want to know what to take in the way of kit, just let me know how you intend to travel, and give me a little more data, and I'll outline an outfit for you—if you want it. Or anything else you might like to know, just ask me. I'll be only too pleased to answer.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Jungle Travel in New Guinea

A WALLABY is a kind of little kangaroo with great big feet:

Question:—"I am greatly interested in the trapping of wild animals. What animals inhabit New Guinea (and any of the other islands, if you know)?

Is it a profitable business?

What kind of an outfit is required?

How about getting a market for the animals?

Do you have to get a permit from the Government? In fact, everything I would have to do.

Could I, a greenhorn, come over, then get into the business and expect to make it pay? If not, could I get in with some one (on some company if there are any) who knows the business?

I am not going to bother you about money, outside of an estimate as to what such an attempt would cost.

What are the chances for an outsider to get a job over there?

I am a lover of adventure, am not afraid to work and have gone through a lot of hardships myself.

Would you advise me to come over there and try my luck?

I know I am asking what to you will probably appear as a lot of fool questions; but to me they are important."—VIRGIL MONROE, Portland, Ore.

Answer, by Mr. Armit:—I am only too pleased to give you any information I can about New Guinea. In the first place New Guinea is an island—the largest in the world—and is split into three sections: Dutch New Guinea, which comprises the western half; Territory of New Guinea, which is the portion formerly owned by Germany and is now under Australian administration by mandate of the League of Nations; and Territory of Papua, which is owned by Australia.

I will answer your queries in the order that they appear in your letter:

There are no wild animals in New Guinea other than the jungle hog and the wallaby—a marsupial that is also found in Australia.

It would be a waste of time and money to trap hogs and wallaby in New Guinea, as there is practically no market for these animals.

New Guinea is a rough country to travel in—absolutely virgin jungle without even a path other than the knife-cut pads carved out of the wall of vegetation that covers the greater part of the island. And it is a costly thing to travel through the jungle, for *everything* you are likely to wear, eat and use on the trip must be carried with you on the backs of your native porters; the jungle is innocent of even the poorest sort of store or shop. Man transport is expensive too, and a moderate estimate for the cost of a tour inland by two white men and thirty native carriers is not less than five hundred dollars a month.

The lonely white man can travel in most countries; in New Guinea he is unknown. Arctic exploration is not more strenuous than a journey through the interior of New Guinea.

There are no companies or individuals engaged in trapping our wild animals, so there is not the slightest chance of your "learning the business;" moreover, there is no such business in New Guinea.

And there is no opportunity for employment in New Guinea. The supply of men familiar with tropical life is more than the available jobs.

You may think I am brutally frank in the foregoing replies, but I wish to let you know exactly how things are here in New Guinea. It would be disastrous for you to come over here "on spec" or to "try your luck," as without money to maintain yourself for several months while you looked about and learned something of local conditions—and hotel board in Port Moresby costs fifty dollars a month—you would speedily be on the rocks.

Utah

THE following is the last of a series of half a dozen leaflets that Mr. Harriman has had us print up for him, dealing with the six States in his charge. Any leaflet, or the whole six of them, may be obtained by applying to him, provided request is accompanied by self-addressed envelop and stamp. Don't expect an answer otherwise.

The preceding leaflets published in the magazine together with dates of issue are: "California," April 10; "Arizona," May 20; "Nevada," June 20; "Washington," July 10; "Oregon," Aug 10.

UTAH has a dry climate and as a result has a health record that is enviable. The State is accounted a desert area, and the bulk of its agricultural production is by irrigation. In a few small areas some little dry-farming is practised, but not much.

The principal industries are farming, stock-raising and mining. In the State are many irrigation projects, where a man may buy land that carries a perpetual water-right and where the soil is excellent. There are some mountain forests, as in all the dry States, under the Forest Service control. These produce considerable lumber.

In the San Juan Basin, where four States corner—Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico—are farms that are prosperous, much stock and enormous coal-fields. Oil has been developed there to some extent. Two or three gold-mines exist in the basin. But there is no railroad.

This is one of the richest areas in our country, and a good road that would carry out the marketable products would result in increasing the riches of the present population greatly and would bring in many more people. This would result in great good. Such a road is projected by Los Angeles capitalists and may be built soon.

The people of Utah are industrious, law-abiding, hospitable, kindly and moral. By sheer ability and dogged perseverance they have made a prosperous State from a disheartening start. My hat is off to the people of Utah, where I found true hospitality and thorough kindness.

Utah has much coal and iron in its mountain country. It has silver and gold, copper and lead. On some of its mountain ridges are the finest type of yellow-pine trees. Its scenery in Bryce Cañon, Zion's Cañon and other parts can not be surpassed.

There are wide areas in Utah where land may be had cheaply. The irrigated areas are increasing rapidly. The soil is fine, and crops are heavy. In Cedar Valley in 1910 an acre of potatoes yielded 329 bushels of clean-skinned, healthy spuds. A ten-acre field of wheat gave 62 bushels to the acre with two irrigations. One of 23 acres returned to its owner 48 bushels per acre with no irrigation.

No finer cattle and horses are seen in the West than are shown at Provo Stock Fair. Sheep are raised by tens of thousands upon the desert spaces, such as Escalante Valley.

It is a State of fulfilled promises, and it still offers great opportunities to citizens who are industrious, sober and persistent. It raises fine fruit wherever care has been taken in selecting the types best suited to local conditions. Its alfalfa is second to none.

Utah is now in the second stage of her progress. The pioneers fought Nature, winning victory after victory. The present-day farmer and stock-breeder coaxes Nature and works with her, achieving resuls impossible under the old plan. And it all results in good to Utah, a State that is bound to be a leader in the Union.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

Vacation Days in Quebec

WHERE to go to get away from the people who want you to say, "Sure is" when they say, "Ain't natcher grand?"

Question:—"I am taking the liberty of coming to you for some help. Myself and wife are figuring on a vacation during the month of August, and we wish to get away from the usual Summer resort.

We had in mind the idea of going as far as possible away from a town, but to get board with some agreeable family that are near a good lake and in or near the pine woods, not so much to fish as to get away somewhere to some place different that we might enjoy a change of climate, people, customs, etc.

Do you know of any locality where we might get these wishes filled?

Any information you might give us sure would be appreciated.

Please do not publish name and address."

Answer, by Maj. Belford:—I congratulate you on your idea of a holiday. Such a vacation means a real rest, and real pleasure as well.

There is abundance of choice. One or two elements enter in. First there is the question of distance from your home, and next that of the French language. There are many very quaint and beautiful spots in Quebec which the average tourist knows nothing about, but where a working knowledge of French is desirable.

In Ontario there is the Rice Lake District, which is reached from Cobourg, Ont., which in turn can be reached from Columbus by train, or by ferry across the lake from Rochester. It is a beautiful lake in a lovely country, good fishing, boating, bathing. Not overrun with tourists. Board could be had at a farmhouse.

Then the Rideau Lake country offers much the same. It is also a lovely scenic country. Both these localities are English. If you would write Mr. Hoffman, manager of the Union Bank at Newboro, Ont., he would be able I think to tell you of some family who would take you in. Newboro would be reached by boat or train to Brockville from Toronto, and train to Newboro.

Further east, Kingsbury, Quebec, is a quiet little village in a farming community. Plenty of timber, a fine lake, Brompton, and a mixed population, French and English. Mr. G. W. Crombie would, I think, give you particulars of a boarding-place.

St. Ferdinand d'Halifax, Quebec, is more French, but English is understood. A pretty spot with a fine lake, off the railway. For particulars write the mayor.

Lake Megantic, Quebec, on the Maine border, is a splendid sheet of water, set among wooded hills. Board could be had at the town of the same name, or across the lake in the country. For particulars of the latter address the Presbyterian clergyman at Marsboro, Que.

There is some sweetly pretty country at the head of Lake Champlain, around Missisquoi Bay. The manager of the Bank of Commerce, Clarenceville, Quebec, would give you particulars. For all these places go first to Montreal by boat for a perfect trip.

There are many beauty spots in the mountains north of Montreal which would suit you, in the Laurentian Hills.

The Gaspésian peninsula is a long journey from you, but it is well worth a visit. It lies along the north shore of the Bay of Chaleur, and Matapedia, Carleton, New Richmond, New Carlisle, Percé, Gaspé Village are all splendid spots for a quiet month. They run east in the order named. If you wish to reach the ultimate, and at the same time a spot that would suit you, write the Rev. Mr. Horner, Peninsula, Gaspé, Quebec.

This gives you a considerable choice, and I will be very glad to give you further information on any point if you write again. One quiet place I have overlooked, perhaps because it is only a few miles distant, is the Carrying Place, on the isthmus between Lake Ontario and the Bay of Quinte. Fishing, boating, bathing, shade, and I should think good farm board easily procurable. Nearest town Trenton, Ontario.

Don't hesitate to write for fuller particulars when you have approximately settled where you wish to go.

I wish you a fine August and the best of good times.

Art Colonies in the Southwest

NEW MEXICO, Mecca of the painter:

Question:—"We have recently come up from Central America and have packed over the mountains, locating here temporarily before making our next move.

We are three young men, members of Camp-Fire; our ages are respectively thirty-two, thirty-one and twenty-five. Two of us are artists by profession. We would like to locate in the mountains, preferably within thirty miles of some city. Having secured a place in the mountains, we would then build a cabin and studio.

We are looking for a place where the weather is temperate all the year round and where good hunting and fishing may be had. We depend chiefly for our living upon arts-and-crafts work and such oil paintings as we may make; therefore it is desirable that we be within reach of some city or tourists' center such as Albuquerque where we could dispose of our work.

We are also interested in the study of drawing of objects of a biological nature, being free-lance field collectors for museums.

We have been informed by a brother artist, Imhoff, now residing in the East, that he spent two years painting and studying Indians in the hills not far from Albuquerque. He said the location he had was ideal in all respects; that is, mountains, forest, streams, and points of fine scenic possibilities. We regret our inability to get in touch with Imhoff at this time for a more definite description of his location, but believe that you as a real Hassayamper can give us some clue to one as good, if not better.

In order to simplify matters we have condensed the information we desire into the form of the following numbered questions.

1. Can you inform us of a section in either southern Utah or New Mexico in the mountains, containing forests and streams which would not be too far from a city, and where the Winters are not severe?

2. Could we buy a small section and erect a cabin and studio for a reasonable sum?

3. How far away from this section is there a city or tourists' haunt where disposal of our work might be possible?

4. Is there any possibility of our being able to locate in a picturesque section within a State game preserve or National Forest, acting in the capacity of wardens?

5. Can you tell us for approximately how much?

We are enclosing a stamped, addressed envelop for your reply and wish now to thank you very much for any information you may be able to give us. We also hope that in the near future we may have the opportunity of thanking you personally for your kindness."—LOS TRES VAGAMUNDOS, *per* A. C. NEWING, Carson City, Nev.

Answer, by Mr. Robinson:—I will answer your questions as numbered:

1. There are many places in this section of the country that will comply with two-thirds of your requirements, but none that I know of that will fulfil all of your desires, and in making your selection you will have to decide which of the two-thirds you will be content with and which third you will be willing to forego.

You want a place in the mountains, containing forests and streams—and according to the first part of your letter where there would be fishing and game—not too far from a city and where the Winters would not be too severe.

If you want the fishing and game in the mountains you will have to get up to considerable altitude—over seven thousand feet—and this would bring you to where the Winters are rather long and somewhat cold with plenty of snow. I have seen it here in New Mexico, near the Colorado line, at 6,760 feet, where the thermometer dropped to 34 degrees below; and last Winter it was down to 20 degrees below, which is rather severe.

You can get into the mountains where there is forest of a kind, principally juniper and piñon and some pine at a lower elevation where you will have the mountain scenery, the trees and some running water; but the hunting and fishing would be almost entirely absent. Here the Winters would not be severe, the average Winter day having a temperature not lower than 10 degrees above, reaching 40 degrees to 50 degrees most days that are clear.

Should you want to get into southern Arizona you can find it even warmer and still have the forest and mountains. The nearness to the cities will also depend on what you will be willing to accept in the other things.

Almost any place along the Sangre de Cristo Mountains you will find the altitude, the mountain stream and the forest, but only along the Pecos perhaps will you be near one of the larger towns, and there your nearest point will be Santa Fé, some forty miles more or less, though you could get all but the fishing nearer.

In the Sandias, at from fifteen to thirty miles from Albuquerque, you can get the timber and mountains, scenery, etc., and the less severe climate in the Winter. You could go down into the Sacramentos perhaps, where you would be within one hundred miles of El Paso and old Mexico. A still finer climate would be in Arizona around Tucson, where you can get into the timber in thirty to forty miles, or near Prescott, where it is as cold as around Albuquerque right close to the city.

Now from the artist's standpoint. I presume you know that New Mexico is getting to be a really great Mecca for the artists, and there is a considerable colony at Santa Fé; and Taos artists are famous the world over. At either point and at Albuquerque also you can get close to the Pueblo Indians, where you can get all kinds of Indian life and secure the most fascinating kind of models for painting. Santa Fé has the museum and a really wonderful art gallery for the exhibition of paintings and other works of art. So from the standpoint of the artist you would not do amiss to come to this section.

2. You could buy a small piece of land on which to build in almost any place; and better, you can go on any of the forest reserves and lease a camp or cabin site for a nominal rental—say ten to twenty dollars a year with a possibility of a twenty-year lease.

3. I really answered this question in No. 1.

4. Very little possibilitity of securing a position in the forests, etc., as warden or similar position. In the National Forests there are just two kinds of men who are acceptable for positions there. First the man who has lived in this section, is familiar with some particular forest, who might be employed as a fire warden or fire fighter, and the man who

knows nothing much about the country, but from training could handle a technical position in some branch of the service.

The only other chance would be some one who wanted to stay with the forestry game permanently or for a series of years. He might be taken on and educated in the field for a permanent thing.

5. For how much? You probably mean what would it cost to build a studio-camp? *¿Quien sabe?* Don't know what you want or where it would be, or how much you could do of the work yourselves. In the forest proper you might build of logs, getting a permit to cut the logs on the forest, they charging a nominal sum for the logs you would use.

Otherwise you could build of adobe, and could probably hire Mexican or other local labor to make and lay up the 'dobies and a few logs for *vigas* for the roof—the regular native and Indian form of construction. This form of construction is not expensive, and you could make it as cheap as you desired or as elaborate as your purses could stand.

A few hundred dollars should be sufficient to put up a fair shelter, provided you would be able to do much of the labor yourselves. Some of the artists in this section are building wonderful places, putting up adobe walls and building in all kind of things rough hand-carved, with home-made doors with hand-hammered latches and hinges, and as you work in the arts and crafts you ought to do something along these lines that would be mighty fine and effective at a small cost other than your own time.

If you are set on this country, I would suggest that you pack up and drift on down here. Come to Albuquerque, and I will give you more information in a short time than I could write in a year. The District Forest Offices are here, and you can there be given all kinds of information regarding the National Forests of New Mexico and Arizona, where you can find the things you want, estimates of cost on building; and as a matter of fact, right here you could get all information you could otherwise find out only by a year or so drifting over the country.

Rather indirectly you ask of the artistic possibilities of this section. I am by way of doing a little along the art line myself, and have done something in the photographic line, and some years ago offered the wares on the market—am not doing anything much in that line now for lack of time—and prepared a little catalog, a copy of which is enclosed. This will show you a tiny bit of what you can find in this section.

Yours for the Southwest, which I boost on all occasions.

P. S.—Since writing the above I have seen one of the officials of the forest service and he called my attention to two other places I have not mentioned.

Above Taos some thirty miles on Red River, near Elizabethtown, or as it is locally known E-town, is an old mining community in the high mountains with wonderful scenery and hunting and fishing at hand. There are many old cabins formerly occupied by miners—this being an old gold-mining section—which could be rented for a few dollars a year. Should you come down other than by train you would probably come *via* Denver or Pueblo, and could come on down past this Red River country and Taos and see for yourself.

There is another really wonderful place. Springerville, Ariz., is on the present transcontinental highway between here and the coast, and is located near the foot of the White Mountains. There is a big traffic over this road—personally came through there on one occasion and counted 125 touring-cars loaded with tourists going one way in one day. Another road is now being constructed over the mountains to Globe and *via* the Roosevelt Dam to Phoenix, and this should double the tourist traffic.

Within ten miles of Springerville, up the mountains and on the headwaters of the Little Colorado River, is all you could desire in the way of mountain scenery, water, timber and the finest hunting and fishing in the Southwest. While Springerville is not much of a town, the tourist traffic might make it a good place as a market for things in the art line.

LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

BAIRD, THOMAS, GEORGE. Last heard of working for Perkins-Goodwin Paper Co., New York, 1909-10. Age about fifty-two, height six feet one inch, weighs about 200 pounds. Tattooed shamrock on right forearm, and anchor on left forearm. Probably connected with executive end of newspaper or paper making company.—Address DAVID E. BAIRD, 144 Ashland Ave., Ocean Park, Calif.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

D. B. K. of Mars. Why do you not keep me posted regarding progress of book? Always interested.—D. B. P.

KENNY, ALBERT. Canadian, aged twenty-three. Six feet, 175 lbs., deep-set blue eyes, very reserved and slow talker. Known as "Hausteca", and "Big Al Kenny" around Zacamixtle when employed as gauger by Hausteca Peb. Co. Left for the South, June, 1922. Later heard of as being in Cordoba and San Salvador. His old side-kick wants to hear from him.—Address J. F. JOHNSEN, C. M. P. A., Puerto Mexico, Ver, Mexico.

CARTER, NICK and CHAS. SCHAUB, ("Schaubie") or any of the old bunch of H'dqrs. Detch. 10th Regiment, U. S. Marines. Write your old bunkie. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JOE CHAS. E. KRAFFT, 601 Melville Ave., Baltimore, Md.

WANTED to hear from parties who are in a position to furnish all authentic and available information of "DIAMOND JOE" (JOHN) REYNOLDS once a steamboat operator on the Mississippi River. Also information concerning his relatives. "Diamond Joe" came into Arizona in 1887, dying in camp, in 1891 at the once famous Congress Mine of which he was principal owner.—Address EDWARD SMITH, Investigations, P. O. Box 501, Prescott, Arizona.

DE VREESE. (father) Supposed to be living in Madrid. Spain. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his son.—Address D. DE VREESE, care of *Adventure.*

MAY, MATTIE MARIE. Any information will be greatly appreciated by her sister.—Address MARGARET LANG, Box 305, Shenondoah, Iowa.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SWAUICK, JOHN JOSEPH. Last heard of last July in Jersey City, N. J. Was to sail for some Southern port. Was formerly a Yeoman on U. S. S. *Alabot.*—Address MRS. JOHN JOSEPH SWAUICK, 34 Elder St., Cumberland, Maryland.

O'NEILL, ARTHUR. Left Meenagh, Coalisland, Ireland, 1879. Last heard of in Butte, Montana, in 1883. Supposed to be horse-trader. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address Rev. E. P. O'NEIL, Williston, N. Dak. or REV. J. P. CANON O'NEIL, Donaghmore, Tyrone, Ireland.

WIRT, G. WILLIAMS. Last heard of in San Francisco, Calif. Born in Homowack, N. Y., age fifty-seven years.—Address CARRIE CORDROCK, 134 Woodlawn Ave., Jersey City, N. J.

WORTLEY, J. R. Any information will be appreciated by his daughter.—Address MRS. PATTIE MARIE BROWN, 722 W. 79th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

BURKE, RAY S. Last heard of was residing at 5947 Greenway St., Phila., Pa. Any information will be appreciated.—Address R. D. H. care of *Adventure.*

MAULE, HARRY ALMERICO. Last heard of in Springfield, Mass. Jan. 1921. Your buddy wants to know where you are. Any information will be appreciated. —Address JOY K. BETZER, Route B, Box 16, Holtville, Calif.

ROGERS, BOB. Left his home in Artemus, Ky. Christmas, 1907 at the age of thirteen. Blond hair, blue eyes. Any information would be greatly appreciated.—Address MATT ROGERS, U. S. S. *Langley*, care of Postmaster, N. Y. C.

SOPHIE, JERRY. Cards from the Camp were the last words received. Willis asked about you. Everything is the same.—BURDETTE.

JOHN M. Your dad is heart-broken and can't forget you. Please ask your mother to forgive me and get in touch with me. God bless you both.—JOHN M. L.

THE following have been inquired for in either the July 20th or August 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine:

BEACH, L. A.; Brancher, G. W.; Delmas, Nick; Donahue, Thomas F.; Ebery, Gordon; Edens, Fred Clark; Finn, Huck; Cevert, Richard; Hirtle, Reginald; Holman, Harry and Krough, John; Key, Maggie; Kubik, Charles J.; Larsen, George Waldo; Lewis, Arthur C.; Luther, Robert; Mayle, Harold B.; McCallister, Wm. R.; McCutcheon, Ernest; McGovern, Thomas P.; McKay, Earl; Richards, Cleon; Roycroft, Lloyd C.; Rucker, C. Ryan; Shmoll, Edward; Steigerwald, Charles F.

MISCELLANEOUS—Boys of Troop "G" and 7th Cavalry; Company "M" 23rd Infantry; Members of 51st Aero Squadron, Mineola.

A COMPLETE list of unclaimed mail will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at the address given do not reach you. Address MORIN TUDURY, care of *Adventure.*

THE TRAIL AHEAD

SEPTEMBER 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **four complete novelettes** mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE THOROUGHBRED *Stephen M. Walmsley*

A race against time.

FOMBOMBO A Four-Part Story Part III *T. S. Stribling*

The hero of the attack on San Geronimo receives his reward.

MATCHED SILVERS *William Byron Mowery*

The trapper needed fifteen hundred dollars.

THE BAITING OF THE WARRIORS *Harold Lamb*

Cossack against Tatar.

SKY, LAND AND MEN *Barry Scobee*

Sweezy the Rat thought it was easy to bilk a rancher.

We all enjoy play, and play brings thirst.

Enjoy thirst~wherever you are, quench it with this beverage ~ not from one vine or one tree, but a blend of pure products from nature's storehouse with a flavor all its own

Drink

Coca-Cola

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

Delicious and Refreshing

5¢

Send 10c for These Useful Souvenirs
An attractive pair of cuff links, a useful thimble, and a book of "Facts" about Coca-Cola, beautifully illustrated.

Served ice-cold at fountains and in bottles.

——————— *USE THIS COUPON* ———————

The Coca-Cola Company, Atlanta, Ga., Dept. Q-8.

Enclosed find 10c, stamps or coin, covering postage and packing, for which send me the 1923 Coca-Cola souvenirs—the cuff links, the thimble and the book, "Facts."

Name-- Street Address-----------------------------------

City-- State--

Once a leading citizen in his town—

He comes back a tramp! He loafs, he spends his friend's money, wears his clothes. Nothing, not even the pleading of the woman who loves him, can make Archer ashamed. And then the man he hates leaves him a fortune that gives him control of the town! What effect will this sudden wealth have on Archer? Will he persecute the town that treated him shabbily?

A thrilling novel is this one called "Mellowing Money," and written by Francis Lynde. It starts in the August issue of Everybody's Magazine. How does it feel to inherit an unexpected fortune? What would you do if you were in Archer's position? Don't fail to read "Mellowing Money" in Everybody's Magazine for August.

Stories by

RAFAEL SABATINI
MRS. WILSON WOODROW
A. D. HOWDEN SMITH
SAMUEL MERWIN
ACHMED ABDULLAH
GEORGE E. HOLT
L. PATRICK GREENE
I. A. R. WYLEY

Also in August
EVERYBODY'S

1st in fiction

On Every News-stand

Everybody's
Magazine
FOR AUGUST